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THE MATE
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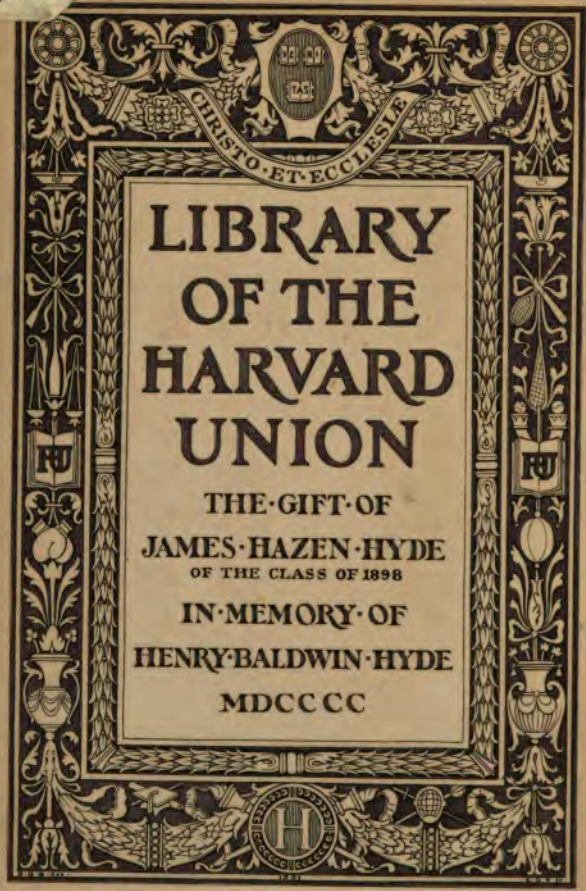
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HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY,
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THE
MATE OF THE DAYLIGHT
AND FRIENDS ASHORE

BY

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

NINTH EDITION

5902

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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1897

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To

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THE MATE OF THE DAYLIGHT.

THREE ancient seafaring men were sitting together in the doorway of a building that looked as if it might once have been the warehouse of a fisherman, but was now entirely out of repair, even for a fish-house. A short, thin old fellow, who looked more active than the rest, was perched on the top of a shaky barrel, swinging his feet; but his two companions, mindful, perhaps, of their rheumatic joints, were enthroned on bait-tubs. Out-doors it was almost raining, the Scotch mist was coming in so thick from sea; and the men were taking all the comfort they could in smoking such strong black tobacco, in dingy clay pipes with no stem to speak of, that the spiders overhead thought it might be best to go out from their shelter, and brave the inclemency of the weather.

"I don't see no prospect of a change," said Captain Joseph Ryder, the man on the barrel. "The wind backed in yisterday, and the clouds has been a-looking greasy for a week past. I told Dan'l,

yisterday, he was a blamed fool to go out; but young fellers, they do set an awful sight by their own opinion."

"What was he a-saying?" asked one of the other men, leaning toward his companion, and putting his hand to his ear. He looked very cross, but he was really good-natured; it seemed as if he thought he ought to wear a look of disapproval at the behavior of men in general. His clothes were made of thick, stiff cloth, and his very skin was so seasoned by long exposure to the weather that it looked like the hide of a very fair-complexioned alligator, or of some other creature that is covered with most durable material.

Captain Joseph Ryder's remarks were reported with some accuracy to Captain Jabez Ryder, and he nodded his head once or twice in approval. "That was all you obsarved, wa'n't it?" he asked in a grumbling, rusty voice, as if he thought his friend might have defrauded him in the repetition. "Well, young folks is fools, so they is. It ain't what I call good seamanship, and I like to see good seamanship aboard of a dory as well as aboard of a nine-hunderd-ton East Indiaman, so I do. Ef a man 's good for anything whatever aboard a vessel, he can turn his hand to one as well as another. In my day young

folks used to have ambition about 'em to rise; but some o' these fellers goes out to the fishing year in and year out, and never leaves off no better than they begun, so they don't."

"Times ain't what they used to be," mourned Captain Peter; and as old Jabez looked at him inquiringly, he repeated his remark at the top of his voice, which was somewhat feeble at best.

"No more they ain't," said Jabez, with satisfaction, and they all puffed silently at their pipes. They were like some worn old driftwood at the harbor-side, and they bore a queer family likeness to the worm-eaten pieces of ship timber and the small rusty anchor with a broken fluke which were stored away near them.

The fish-house fronted on a narrow alley-way, which led from the main street of the town down to a wharf. It was standing a little askew, having been built at a time when perfectly straight streets were not thought necessary. In fact, the whole town had a strange, disorderly look, as if its buildings had been brought all at once and set down wherever there was room, but the inhabitants had never thought it worth while to take the trouble to arrange them better. It gave one a feeling of gratitude that some of the little houses had not been carelessly dumped on their sides,

or upside down, which would have made house-keeping in them even more inconvenient than it was. As one went along the streets, some of the buildings stood cornerwise, and some had their back doors where the front should have been; the whole little town was like a company of soldiers which had broken ranks, and it was altogether picturesque and charming, with its unexpected lilac bushes and bits of garden, and its windowed roofs and narrow, cobble-stoned streets.

Opposite the fish-house was the gray and lichened, rough-shingled wall of a deserted warehouse, and as the three captains sat looking solemnly at this, and past the corner of it toward the water, there suddenly appeared the figure of a young girl against the dull background. She had been walking fast, and her face was flushed with the damp fog and her eagerness. "I 've been hunting all round for you, grandfather," she said. "I suppose you forgot about that fish for the chowder? Aunt Melinda said I had better come right out and look you up, else we should n't get much of a dinner to-day."

Captain Ryder looked very sorry for this omission, and got down quickly from his barrel, while Captain Jabez put his hand to his ear, and demanded an explanation of the sudden summons. He was a little

disappointed at finding it was only that his crony had forgotten to buy a fish; it seemed to him that an unexpected guest must have arrived, or that some one was taken suddenly ill, or had died, for Susan was in such a hurry. But if he had stopped to think he might have been sufficiently surprised: it was seldom that a retired shipmaster in that port forgot to order his dinner; it was too often the only real business which interfered with his idleness all day long.

"Cap'n Joe," as his friends called him, hurried off by the way of the wharves, apologizing to himself as he went; but Susan lingered behind a moment. "Do you know whether Dan Lewis is out or not to-day?" she asked Captain Downs softly, as if afraid of being overheard by her retreating grandfather; and she was answered that the fishing-smack had gone out, in spite of repeated warnings, late the night before.

"I 'm afraid Dan'l will get hisself into mischief," the old sailor said, while Susan's cheeks grew brighter than ever, and old Captain Jabez looked curiously from one face to the other, and was fairly shaking with impatience. Susan had nothing more to say, but turned quickly, as if much disturbed, and went away, slipping a little on the wet round stones of the paving; and when she had turned the corner from

the alley-way into the main street, she walked as fast as she could toward home. When she reached the house she shut the door so angrily that the old brass knocker clacked, and the hanging-lamp, which the captain had brought in his young days from over seas, rattled its chains and jarred and jingled. It was not the custom of the family to come in at the front door, and Miss Melinda Downs appeared suddenly at the head of the crooked little staircase to see what the matter was. She was not dressed for visitors, and she looked relieved when she found it was her niece. "I was afraid you was an agent or somebody," she said. "Did you find father?"

"Yes, I did," said Susan, who was very much excited; her eyes were shining, and she looked as if she could hardly keep from crying. "And what 's more, I found that Dan has gone off fishing, just as I supposed he would; and Heaven knows if anybody will ever see him again! Just like him, and of course he found plenty of fools ready to go with him. There 's an awful storm coming, and the schooner was n't half ready for sea; he told me so last night, and they sailed before morning."

"They can't have got far," said Miss Melinda, not without some anxiety. "I guess you 'd find they was laying off here in the harbor, if the fog lifted.

There ain't been a breath of wind all the morning; it 's dreadful close. I dare say they 'll put into some other port to fit themselves out, if it 's so they don't come right in here again. Just like Dan's nonsense, all fire and tow! I s'pose he thought 't would sound smart. I hope he split up a few kindlin's for his poor, feeble old mother before he went. I see her, when I come by yisterday, hacking away in the wood-house with a dull axe. I should think he 'd be ashamed to go strutting 'round the way he does. Father went right off to see about the fish, I s'pose? I don't know what time he 'll get his dinner. I never knew him to forgit before," she added, prudently trying to change the subject, for she saw how Susan's eyes flashed.

"I guess they ain't laying off in the harbor," rejoined the younger woman, stamping her foot with rage. "It 's a mercy if they ain't gone to pieces on the rocks, before now. It blew dreadful hard along towards morning. And I 'll just tell you one thing: I don't blame Dan Lewis one mite for being mad, and I ain't going to live here no longer, like a toad under a harrow. I 'm just going to do as I 'm a mind to, quick 's ever I 'm out of my time; and I 'm going to marry Dan Lewis, whether anybody says I can or not. No fellow would stand what was said to him last night."

"There, there," said aunt Melinda, soothingly; "don't get so worked up, Susan. Your gran'ther means to do well by you; I'm sure he always has, and he's all for your good. His bark's worse than his bite, you know's well as I do."

"Nobody wants to hear him bark as I know on," said Susan, scornfully; and Melinda escaped with the excuse of the captain's coming in at the kitchen door, fish in hand.

"Let her alone," whispered the elder woman, to her father, who had an anxious look, as if he half expected a battle. She's dreadful worked up about Dan's going off, but she'll get over it if you don't say nothing to set her going."

Nothing was farther from the captain's mind than to wish for an encounter with Susan. She did not meet him until dinner was ready, when she came down to take her seat at the table like a sulky and displeased guest. She always helped to get dinner, and that day she had told herself several times, during the hour that she spent in her own room, that she would not go down to share the noonday meal; but the chowder's savory odor was wafted up the stairs, and proved irresistible, for she was a young person of good appetite, and she was, for some reason or other, hungrier than usual. The captain

made awkward attempts at keeping up a brisk and unconscious talk, but Susan's expression was that of grim stolidity. She made herself look very ugly when it pleased her to feel so; she was at other times a pretty girl, with a fine color, as we have already seen, and bright black eyes, that took quick, sharp glances at the world. She was generally good-humored and merry, but when a cloud went over her sky it was very bad weather indeed. After dinner Captain Ryder went to sleep in his chair, as usual, and his injured granddaughter helped clear away the table and wiped the dishes, as if it ought not to have been expected of her under the circumstances. Then she withdrew again to her bedroom, and her aunt Melinda, who never took afternoon naps, after a suitable interval put on her second-best bonnet and shawl, and went out, closing the door gently after her. The house was still, and the captain slept later than usual. When he waked it was half-past three, and he had promised to be on one of the tumble-down wharves at three, to measure some firewood. His neck was stiff, and he had an uneasy sense of guilt as he wondered what had become of the women-folks, and especially of Susan.

After Susan had left the fish-house, that morning,

the two captains had waited for a few minutes, to be sure she was out of hearing, and then Captain Jabez had edged his overturned bait-tub as close as possible to his companion's, and asked to hear what had been said. "I guess they must ha' had some trouble amongst 'em last night," he said, not without contempt. "I seen him a-settin' by the fore-room window, as I was a-passin' by, near about eight o'clock, if I don't disremember. Cap'n Joe, he was out somewhere; likely he went over to inquire for Mis' Cap'n Stark. I met him a-goin' home, and it may be he turned Dan'l out o' the house, and he 's made off. I could n't get no sight at what drove him out to sea this miser'ble weather. And did n't it bear on your mind that Cap'n Joe was some out o' sperits? Acted like he 'd lost his reck'nin', so he did!"

"He wa'n't out o' sperits 's I know on," said Captain Peter. "I see him coming out o' Tarbell's shop just afore ten, and I guess he had his nipper aboard. 'T ain't often he forgits it; but I did think he was airlier than common to-day. P'raps he 'd mistook the hour, but most like he wanted it to stay him."

"'T ain't never well to change hours, so it ain't," said Captain Jabez, after some reflection. "And ten 's too airly; you lose all the good on 't by dinner time. I don't blame Joe; he 's been a saving man, and it

ain't his natur' to want Dan Lewis to make ducks and drakes of his property. I suppose he must have as much as nine or ten thousand, ain't he?"

"He 's got that, sure," acknowledged Captain Downs. But they had too often settled the amount of money which belonged to every man of their acquaintance to make the subject an absorbing one, if there were any other at hand. "Dan Lewis is a high-strung fellow, and I never set no great by him," he went on; "but young folks will have their way, and old folks has to stand back. I should ha' thought Susan would ha' looked higher. Dan ain't got nothing to look to from his folks; it 's been all his mother could do to scratch along; and to be sure, he 's got the berth o' second mate o' the Daylight, but with the plight navigation 's in now it 's lucky if she goes out o' her dock for a year to come. His uncle only give him the place because poor old Mis' Lewis beseeched him so. Dan 's lazy as a flounder, naterally. He never 'd 'a' undertook to carry on fishing if he had n't wanted to stand well in Cap'n Joe's books. Susan 's distressed to get him, ain't she, 's if he was an East Indiaman loaded to the water's edge? Talk about love! I should think a gal like her would have sense enough to look ahead and provide for herself accordin' to. All the Ryder girls, her

father's sisters, married cap'ns, and I sh'd think she'd have some ambition. But I s'pose she 's lookin' for'ard to having means enough o' her own, when Joe 's done with it. I 'd like to see who 'll beat, though, her or Joe! They ain't neither one on 'em liable to change their minds. Susan 's a reg'lar chip o' the old block."

Captain Jabez was having an unusually pleasant morning. He could hear the voice of this friend easily, and Captain Peter Downs was a good-natured, sociable old fellow, who was willing to gossip with this deafest and dullest of his neighbors rather than not gossip at all. Captain Jabez had heard this long discourse with great satisfaction. He did not often find people willing to tell him secrets; but there was a good opportunity in that secluded spot, and voices could be raised to shouting pitch, and subjects discussed without fear of outside listeners.

"I s'pose she 's got the right to suit herself; she 's the one that 's going to marry the fellow," said Captain Downs, in conclusion.

But this sentiment did not find favor with Captain Jabez, who prided himself on nothing more than his experience of life and his knowledge of human nature. "I don't agree with ye, so I don't," he remarked, looking at a great silver watch, and making

ready to start for home. "Whoever a gal picks out, all her folks has to marry him as much as she does; and a gal ought to consider whether her folks wants to take a man in for better and worse as a relation. You 're a sight more beholden to relations by marriage than you be to your own folks."

"I do' know but what you 're right," meekly observed Captain Downs, and the two old salts went stiffly away together in search of their dinners.

It happened that the story, in some mysterious way, found wings and flew about town that Captain Joe Ryder and Dan Lewis had had some hard words, and Susan's frame of mind was indescribable in consequence. Captain Jabez's wife, a person of great activity, met him at the door at noon with the news, and was very pleased to find that he had seen both Susan and her grandfather, and was wiser in the matter than she. He had often failed in his duty of bringing home the news since he had grown deplorably deaf. Mrs. Ryder treated him with unusual attention; she even delayed dinner a little, while she made a pudding-sauce of which her partner for life was very fond, and which he usually had served him only when there was company. "I do' know but if you feel like it we 'll go round to Joseph's to-night,

after supper," she ventured, when dinner was nearly over, and the captain was unmistakably serene. "He 's all the cousin you 've got, and we ain't been there of an evening all through the summer. I 've got some things I want to consult Melindy about, and like 's not they 'll be glad to have us drop in if they ain't feelin' comfortable among themselves."

Captain Jabez was usually much averse to paying ceremonious visits. He was some years older than his wife, and he was generally unable to join in the conversation to any satisfactory extent; he liked to smoke his pipe and read the newspaper in peace at home. But he consented to this plan with unwonted willingness, though he felt that he must grumble at it a little at first. "I can't go to work a-rigging up just as I 'm getting off to bed," he growled mildly. But his wife took a good look at him, and said that she did n't know as there would be any need of his putting on a clean shirt; it was n't as if it was daytime. Besides, it was different, just dropping in to see your own folks; she should n't like to appear as if they made much of it.

So after Mrs. Ryder had stowed away the tea things, and had brought the captain his coat and helped him into it, they started out. It was very late in the summer, and the evenings were growing

long; the fog was coming in thicker than ever from sea, and it was already dark. The captain, whose eyes were not much better than his ears, always refused to go forth after night-fall without his lantern. The old couple steered slowly down the uneven sidewalk toward their cousin's house. The captain walked with a solemn rolling gait, learned in his many long years at sea, and his wife, who was also short and stout, had caught the habit from him. If they kept step, all went well; but on this occasion, as sometimes happened, they did not take the first step out into the world together, so they swayed apart, and then bumped against each other, as they went along. To see the lantern coming through the mist, you might have thought it the light of a small craft at sea in heavy weather.

"I'm most sorry we come out, it 's such a bad night, and your rheumatism, too!" said Mrs. Ryder regretfully in the captain's best ear, which luckily happened to be next her. And the captain rejoined that anybody would think they must be put to it; but it was none o' his doing.

"I'll say to Joseph that I want to look over some papers that he keeps, and him and me 's concerned in; that 'll explain it, and they won't think we come a-spyin' round."

Mrs. Ryder's heart had begun to fail her; she would have turned toward home again just before this, if she could have mustered courage. She thought it was very handsome of the captain, and said to herself that she would not forget it.

Miss Melinda Ryder and the old captain, her father, had passed a very dull day, and the evening had closed in with uncommon gloom. Susan had maintained a dignified silence at supper time, and had returned to her room afterward, and shut its door in such a manner that it was plain to see that she had not forgiven the sins of her family against her. For some reason or other the captain had failed to receive his evening paper, and he had nothing to do but look at the small, unwilling fire which his daughter had lighted in the Franklin stove in the dining-room, the evening being chilly. She had forgotten herself, and before she stopped to think had lighted the sticks that topped the careful structure made ready for the fire. They were nice-looking round sticks of white birch, and she regretted their loss very much. She was much attached to them, beside; she had taken them off and laid them by a great many times. Everything seemed to be awry, and neither she nor the captain would have grieved if they had been sure that Dan Lewis had taken himself off with the determination never to darken their doors again.

The knock at the door which they heard presently was most startling, and they could have confessed that they were afraid that the young man had come back and meant to "have it out," and decide his right to Susan. The guests, however, did not wait for an answer to their summons with the knocker, but opened the door at once, and were pleased with the look of delight and relief on the faces of their host and hostess.

"Step up and speak to Susan, will you?" said Captain Joe to his daughter. "Tell her who 's here." Melinda obeyed, with much fear and trembling. Susan had forgotten to take a light up-stairs with her. She was not at all sleepy, and she was very tired, to tell the truth, of sitting in the dark. Her manner had a little loftiness, but she was very gracious, and the rest of the company took heart and were cheerful. Captain Jabez explained the object of his visit to his cousin, and the papers were at once brought out from a hiding-place in the old secretary in the dining-room, which stood in the stead of an office and counting-room to Captain Joe. He was ship's husband to a small craft in which the cousins were part owners. They talked for some time over the affairs of the Adeline in language intelligible only at times to the unenlightened listener, and in the mean time

the three women chatted together softly, at the other side of the room.

Captain Jabez was in high spirits, and made himself most agreeable. He had always been called good company before his deafness had isolated him in the midst of society; in his young days he had been a good deal of a beau and gallant, and his wife was proud of him yet, and always said that nobody knew so well as he how to carry things off well. She refused, on this ground, to grant him permission to absent himself from her tea-parties or sewing-society suppers, which were the main features of the town festivities. He had grown very heavy and stupid of late, — at least, it seemed so to most of his neighbors, — but this evening call had awakened much of his ancient vivacity.

It was an awful moment to all the rest when he turned, with apparent innocence, to Susan, and said, "Cap'n Peter said you was inquiring about Dan Lewis and them that was out fishing?"

"Yes!" shouted Susan, with great bravery, her cheeks growing scarlet.

"I s'pose you 've heard by this time that they 've got in? I chanced to be down on Sand's wharf when they come ashore, and a more miser'ble-looking set o' drownded rats I never see; but they was fools to have

put out in such weather, so they was, and I told 'em so. Dan'l, he said that they got outside and set their trawls in the night; but there was an old sea a-running, and their trawls parted and caught, so they lost two thirds o' one on 'em. I don't see how they got in. They said they never see no such a fog as there is outside. They worked toward the shore somehow or 'nother, and after a while they heard the town bell ringing at one o'clock, and they steered by that. 'T was about four o'clock when they come in. Dan'l said if it had come on to blow, 't would 'a' been all day with 'em. He said he was a fool to go out. The airs seemed to be took out o' him a little for once."

"Glad of it," said Captain Joe, chuckling with delight, while the three women grew more and more uneasy. "Dan'l al'ays was all talk and no cider."

Susan looked very black. She had borne with Captain Jabez patiently; there was no knowing that he had heard the town gossip. But deaf people hear more things that are worth listening to than people with better ears; one likes to have something worth telling in talking to a person who misses most of the world's talk.

"I 'm sorry you forget yourself so as to say such a thing as that," Susan said scornfully to her grandfather; and she spoke loud enough for Captain Jabez

to hear. "I won't stand by and hear Dan abused. I may as well tell all of you now that I am going to marry him."

"There, there, Susan! Don't be hasty," whispered Miss Melinda Ryder appealingly. The girl looked for a minute as if she could hardly keep from crying. She had been very anxious about her lover, and she was glad enough to hear of his safety; but she said, after an awful pause of a few minutes, that she could n't see why everybody made such a touse about his going out fishing, any way. It had happened times enough before that men had gone out in the night and been caught by the fog.

"We won't talk no more about it now, Susan," commanded Captain Joe, with an air of offended dignity, and Susan feared that she had gone too far. It was all very well to hold her own, and she had taken pride all day in her ability to make her grandfather uncomfortable; but it would not do to provoke him altogether, since he might leave his money in a way that she would regret. And he had always been very kind to her until lately, when she had been calling him a tyrant, and had pleased herself with considering him her enemy.

The proverb with which Captain Joe had roused this battle about his ears had left a suggestion in his

mind, and he rose from his chair, while the rest of the company were trying to collect the stray bits of conversation which were left in their shocked minds; and, taking the small hand-lamp from the secretary and a pitcher from the closet, he went down cellar, and drew some of the ale which the mention of talk and cider had made him remember.

"It 's'out of a little kag that Aleck Jones sent me for a present last week," he explained, as he came puffing up the stairs. "Git some glasses, will you, Melinda?"

Captain Jabez coughed gravely, and the ale proved very good, and all seemed fair weather again. Susan looked shyly up at her grandfather's face as he gave her a tumbler. She was not fond of ale, but she did not like to refuse this. She could not help noticing that the old man's hand shook, and that he looked hurt and tired. He took no notice of her, apparently; he had grown very old this last year, she thought, and she was sorry she had been so angry with him. But she would teach folks to let Dan Lewis and herself alone.

Captain Jabez and his wife set sail on their homeward voyage at an early hour. They expressed a fear that the fog might turn to rain, and the lantern went bobbing and swaying up the street. "What

possessed you to get going about Dan Lewis?" asked Mrs. Jabez, reproachfully. "You spoilt everything, and we was having such a pleasant talk, all of us."

"I wanted to stir her up," answered the captain, composedly. "I never did like that girl over well. I don't think she 's got no sort o' gratitude, after all that 's been done for her. She got a piece o' my mind about that fellow's going on, so she did."

"It don't do no good," said his wife, "and you 've got no more sense than a boy. Why did n't you tell me they 'd come in?" To which the captain made no answer, taking refuge in his deafness, though he could always hear what his wife said, being so well used to her voice.

Captain Joe Ryder came back to the dining-room, after bolting and locking the fore-door behind his visitors. "I guess I 'll make for bed," he said. "And, Susan, I 've got one thing I want to say to you: I 've treated you as well as I knew how, and I 've done for your good ever since you was left a baby; and if I don't want you to fling yourself away on a worthless fellow that can't call a dollar his own, I don't know as I 'm to blame for it. And I think you 've let yourself down, speaking so smart to me afore folks; it hurt my feelin's."

Susan began to cry. "I 'm sure you 're always hurtin' mine," said she. "I can't help it if I do like him; and there 's lots of fellows that start without any means, and get rich soon enough."

The captain turned back as he heard this. "He don't come of a good stock, and I should rather he showed me five thousand dollars in his hand than have him promise he was going to make it. I and my father before me lived single till we owned that much money, and if you 'd seen as much of this world as I have you 'd think we done right. You wait till you 're as old as I be, and you 'll look at most things different from what you do now. I always have calc'lated on seeing you well married and settled afore I 'm laid away, and I hope to yet; but there 's no sense in marrying a fellow just because he 's good-lookin' and has a smart way with him," and the captain shut his bedroom door behind him, and said no more.

Susan considered herself to be in a position of great misery, and she sat by the window and cried as long as she could, after she went up-stairs. She pitied herself very much, and yet she had a great respect for herself as the heroine of an unhappy love affair.

But in the morning affairs wore a different aspect.

Dan Lewis came in soon after breakfast, looking excited and pleased, and as if he had something to say that would make him welcome. Captain Joe spoke to him civilly, and the women bade him good-morning, and looked at him curiously, for they were sure he had important news.

"I came to tell you that I got a letter from my uncle last night, sir," he told the captain, "and he says that the Daylight is going to sail as quick as they can fit her out, and he wants me aboard right away. I'm going on to New York this afternoon."

"Oh, Dan!" cried Susan, with real distress. "Can't you put it off until to-morrow?" But Dan went on talking to the captain.

"My uncle says she 's going to Liverpool in ballast, but the owners are sure of getting a freight there for the East Indies. They 're going to send her along, anyhow, for there 's nothing doing in freights in New York, and" —

"Right they are, too," interrupted the captain. "I was reading the other day how freights were looking up on the other side, and they was short of ships, for a wonder. It was betwixt hay and grass with 'em, and bad head-winds had delayed a good many vessels bound for English ports. And you 'll have a quick run across; it 's a first-rate time o' year.

Well, I wish you a good v'y'ge, my boy, and a safe return," said the captain, heartily, feeling the kinship of sailor with sailor, and forgetting his dislike for the man himself.

Dan took courage from the captain's cordiality, and with a glance at Susan, who stood listening, with her eyes full of tears, he said, "If I do well, I hope you 've no objections to my asking Susan" —

The old man's face looked black for a minute, but he quickly recovered himself. "Not if you do well, I have n't, Dan; but a second mate's berth ain't much of a business in the state navigation 's in now. But if you show you mean to do well, and I hear a good report of you, I sha'n't have anything to say against it, if so be that you keep of the same mind, both of you. You 've got just as good a chance as the next one, if you 're willing to put right to; and there 's money to be earnt yet followin' the sea, bad as times is. You young folks thinks that love 's the main p'int, and I don't say but what it is; but there 's a good deal more chance for it to hold out when there 's means to make things comfortable. And you ought to want Susan to have a good home full as much as I do."

"I do set everything by her," said the young sailor; but he looked humbled at this announcement

of what would be expected of him as to material comforts.

"I 've only got one thing more to say to you," the captain added. "If I do hear good accounts of you, and have reason to think you 've done well, I 'll help you out any way I can. I know you have n't got any folks of your own to look to. It ain't as if your uncle had n't met with bad luck of late years."

"He 's doing very well this past year," said Dan, with as much pride as he dared show; "and he says he means to push me ahead as fast as he can."

"Better look to yourself for that," said Captain Joe, gravely. "Talk 's cheap;" and, Miss Melinda having been called to the door by some one who had come with an errand, he went out to the garden, which lay behind the house, and left the lovers to themselves. Susan cried, but the mate of the Daylight was not moved to grief; he consoled her as best he could, and with great kindness, and showed her that he carried her picture in his waistcoat pocket, and told her that he should kiss it every day. And then he kissed her several times, and promised to write and to think of her; and altogether they were very sad and affectionate, being much in love, and feeling that they were hardly used by fortune, since, if Captain Joe had ever said the word, they would

have been married, and Dan would have willingly taken up his residence in the home of Susan's childhood. He meant to settle down into the business and idleness of fishing and coasting, and of doing great things with Captain Joe's savings by and by, when he had the opportunity. And he certainly was the handsomest young man in town. Susan watched him proudly through her tears, as he hurried away at last. His mind was full of going down the street to tell his acquaintances of his prospects and his long voyage; and afterward he must go home to toss his belongings into his sea-chest, and say good-by to his mother. She was old and in ill-health, and the thought struck him sharply that he might not find her there to welcome him when the voyage was over and he came home again.

By noon of that day he had gone. The people of the town were used to their neighbors going away to sea, and so Dan's departure did not make a great excitement. The subject of his relations with the Ryder family was discussed for a while, but it was decided that he was not engaged to Susan, and that affairs were left in the state they had been in for some time before.

Many months afterward, in the middle of a pleas-

ant September afternoon, Miss Melinda Ryder took a solitary walk to the old burying-ground on the hill. As we have heard, all her sisters had married captains, and Melinda herself had been promised to a young man, who was unfortunately drowned on his first voyage as master. She had never replaced him in her affection; her love and loyalty grew stronger and stronger instead of fading away. She had been expecting to marry him in a few weeks, when his homeward voyage should have ended, and on high days and holidays ever since she had looked sadly through the old sea-chest of her father's, that held many of the treasures that her lover had given her, and what was left of her now quaint and old-fashioned wedding outfit. And once in a while, through the summer weather, she went to this burying-ground, where a stone had been raised in the family lot to his memory, and felt herself at such times, and in fact at many others, to be a widow indeed. It always seemed to her as if that were his grave; at any rate, she felt a greater nearness to him in that spot than in any other. His family, with great consideration, had asked her advice in the choice of the head-stone, and though she liked marble best, she had chosen a tall, broad slab of slate, on which was cut the familiar figure of a mourner beneath a wil-

low-tree. She identified this figure with herself always, and it was a matter of great sorrow to her that it would be out of the question for her to be buried at the side of this untenanted grave. She would have been glad if she could have been sure that she would be buried there, but she never dared to express such a wish; it would sound very strange, she thought, and yet it seemed to her to be her proper resting-place.

On this day it was very pleasant in the burying-ground. The wind was blowing in from the sea, and the tall, uncared-for grass waved this way and that; and she read the name of one old acquaintance after another, as she went along a crooked path that wound among the graves. Miss Ryder was already an old woman, and she was tired with her walk, and was glad to stop to rest, as she read for the hundredth time the name of Captain Joseph Sewall: Lost at Sea. There was no one in sight, and she gently stroked the slate head-stone with her hand, and picked off a gray lichen that had fastened its tenacious roots into the crevice of one of the letters, while the face of her sailor lover came clearly to her mind. She did not know why, but she felt very lonely that day. She and Susan had never been very dear to each other; it was an affection bred of

attachment and kinship and long association, rather than an instinctive drawing together of their natures, and she knew that Susan's home was not likely to be hers, and that in all probability her father could not live many years longer; at his death she would be left alone. Her married sisters were all dead, and Susan's father, her only brother, had died many years before. "It 's the common lot of all," she told herself, "and I ought to be thankful that it is likely father will leave me very comfortable."

Susan had been anxious of late about her lover. The letters had not come often at best, for the mate of the Daylight did not hold the pen of a ready writer, and the long voyages from port to port had caused long silences that were nobody's fault. The last report from the ship had been that the next move was undecided; she might sail for the East Indies again before coming back to the States. There had been heavy gales at sea, and Miss Melinda had felt great sympathy for her niece when she asked the old captain so eagerly every day if there were any letters, and was disappointed by his answer.

She never had pitied the girl so much as she did when the thought came to her that the ship might be lost and that Susan would have to bear a sorrow like her own.

And Miss Ryder seated herself on the grass, and sat looking off to sea. How many times she had sat there, and how dark the world used to seem to her when she came there first to show respect for her lover and her tenderness for his memory! Yet the years had worn away one by one, and this faithful soul had in later days wondered as much about the meeting, at some not far distant time, as she had dwelt in thought over the sad farewell of many years before.

Miss Ryder made a call or two on her way home, and it was almost tea-time when she reached the house, and heard an unusual noise of voices as she hurried in. What a surprise it was to see young Lewis, grown older and broad-shouldered, with his face browned and reddened by the sea winds! Susan was beaming with happiness, and Captain Joe looked very pleased and interested, and was listening to a long story of the voyage. Miss Ryder had not prepared her mind for being kissed, but kissed she was, and her father laughed and rubbed his hands together; she thought he looked older than ever as he sat by the side of this bronzed, eager young man.

"Why, when did you get in?" she asked the sailor. And he told his story again, that the ship had reached New York only the day before, and he

wished to come home to surprise them, and so had sent no message.

"He is going back early in the morning," said the captain. "He tells us he has been made master of the ship;" and if young Lewis had been the old man's only son he could not have looked happier or prouder; while Susan tossed her head a little, as if she were not surprised, and had always been sure of this triumph from the beginning.

It proved that the captain of the Daylight had been washed overboard in a gale the third day out, and the first mate had been ill during the homeward voyage, and had been forced to give up his position altogether. So Susan's lover had brought the ship across, and had handled her well, too. He had taken the first mate's duties for several weeks before they had reached Bristol, and had won great respect for his knowledge of seamanship: this and his relationship to one of the owners had secured him the position of captain. More than this, he had carried away some money which his mother had given him from her little hoard, and he had traded with it, and brought her home more than three hundred dollars, while he had something of his own beside his pay, in his pocket. The elder captain was ready to hear of his future projects, and a more cheerful company never sat down to drink tea together.

The first Sunday he spent at home, he and Susan walked up the broad aisle of the church side by side to Captain Ryder's pew, and she wore triumphantly a wide red India scarf folded about her shoulders. And on week days she was proud to show the young women of her acquaintance other timely gifts from her handsome and promising lover. So the mate of the Daylight returned to his unbelieving friends a shipmaster, and when he sailed on his next voyage, having gained the owners' permission to carry her, he had his wife for company.

But old Captain Jabez, who had been made to hear all these things with difficulty, on account of his increasing deafness, grumbled out one day, as he sat on one of the wharves in the sunshine, like an old fly who had just crawled out of a crack in the spring, "It's the next v'y'ge that'll show what stuff he's made of. You might say this was his luck, but the next'll have to be his earning. There's plenty of able shipmasters, lying idle, I should think they'd ha' took afore they did him. But I wish Dan well, so I do. I'm one that likes to see young folks prosper and have their day. I've had mine!"

A LANDLESS FARMER.

I.

It was late in a lovely day of early spring, the first warm Sunday of the year, when people who had been housed all winter came out to church, looking pale, and as if they had been hidden or lost for months. It seemed as if winter, the stern old king, had suddenly died, and as if the successor to the throne were a tender-hearted young princess, and everybody felt a cheerful sense of comparative liberty and freedom. The frogs were lifting up their voices in all the swamps, having discovered all at once that they were thawed out, and that it was time to assert themselves. A faint tinge of greenness suddenly appeared on the much-abused and weather-beaten grass by the roadsides, and the willows were covered with a mist of greenish gold. The air was fragrant, and so warm that it was almost summer-like; but the elderly people shook their heads, as they greeted

each other gravely in the meeting-house yard, and said it was fine weather overhead, or perhaps spoke of the day reproachfully as a weather-breeder. There seemed to be a general dislike to giving unqualified praise to this Sunday weather, which was sure to be like one of the sweet spring flowers that surprise us because they bloom so early, and grieve us because they are so quick to fade.

After church was over in the afternoon, two or three men were spending an idle hour on a little bridge where the main highway of Wyland crossed Cranberry Brook; a small stream enough in summer, when it could only provide water sufficient for the refreshment of an occasional horse or dog belonging to some stray traveler. It was apt to dry up altogether just when it was needed most; but now the swamp which it drained was running over with water, and sent down a miniature flood, that bit at the banks and clutched at the roots and tufts of rushes as if it wished to hold itself back. It had piled already a barricade of leaves and sticks and yellow foam against the feeble fence that crossed it at the roadside, and the posts, which were almost rotted away, were leaning over and working to and fro, as if they had hard work to stand the strain, and might fall with a great splash and go down stream with the

mossy rails and the sticks and yellow foam any minute.

The water had risen to within a short distance of the floor of the bridge, and the three men stood watching it with great interest. Two of them, who had come from church, had found the other standing there. He owned the pasture through which the brook ran on its way to the river; but on that side of the road the ground fell off, so there was a small cascade; and his own stone walls, which stopped at the edge of this, were in no danger. He wore his every-day clothes, but the other men were in their Sunday best.

"Warm for the time o' year, ain't it?" asked one of these, taking off his hat, and giving his forehead a rub with his coat sleeve. "I wore my overcoat that I have been wearing this winter to meeting this morning, and the heft of it was more than a load of hay. I come off without it this afternoon. The folks said I should get my death o' cold, and I do' know but they was right, but I wa'n't going to swelter as I did in the forenoon for nobody."

"'T is warm," said Ezra Allen, who was without his own waistcoat, and who whittled a deliciously smooth and soft bit of pine with a keen-edged knife, in ideal Yankee fashion. "I 've been looking to see

that old fence of Uncle Jenkins's topple over; the stream 's most as high as I ever see it. I should n't wonder if it come over the bridge, if this weather holds."

"Crambry Brook 's b'en over this bridge more times 'n' you 've got fingers and toes, Ezra," said the third man, scornfully. "Guess you 've forgot. When I was a boy, 't was customary for it to go over the bridge every spring, and I do' know but I 've seen it in the fall rains as well. Parker Jenkins come near getting drowned here once, you know."

"You 're thinking of the little old bridge that used to be over it when we was boys; 't was two or three foot lower than this. The road used to be all under water in them days; I know that well as anybody. I was n't referring to the bridge. I said the brook was high as I ever see it. Ef you had that little bridge that was here before they h'isted up the road, I guess you 'd find it well wet down."

"Don't seem to me as if the brooks run so high as they used," suggested Henry Wallis, mildly. "They say it 's because the country 's been stripped of its growth so. Cutting the pines all off lets the sun get to the springs, and the ground dries right up. I can't say I understand it myself, but they 've got an argument for everything nowadays."

"There ain't so much snow as there used to be when we was boys," said Ezra Allen. "I never see no such drifts anywhere about as used to be round the old school-house; we used to make caves in 'em that you could stand right up in, and have lots o' clear room overhead, too."

"You 're considerable taller than you was in them days, Ezry," said Asa Parsons. "That makes some difference;" and the three neighbors laughed together, as if it were a great joke.

All through the parish were little groups of people like this, gossiping together on their unfrequented front steps, or before the barn doors, where happy fowls fluffed their feathers and scratched the wet ground, or quawked and strutted to and fro. There was a good deal of social visiting going on, and as the three men stood together on the bridge, which was a favorite abiding place in summer, being not far from several farmhouses, they spoke to one neighbor after another, as he or she went along in the muddiest possible wagons. As for the horses, they were steaming as if they had come from the races, and looked as if they wished, like their masters, to be relieved of their winter coats.

"Seems to me everybody was out to-day," said Ezra Allen, who was a rosy-faced, pleasant-looking

man of about forty. "I do' know when I 've missed a Sunday before;" and he went on clipping little white chips from his stick, which was dwindling away slowly.

The other men waited for a few moments, until they became certain that he would say no more of his own accord; and then Asa Parsons boldly inquired what had kept him at home from meeting, and was told that he had watched the night before with old Mr. Jerry Jenkins.

"I want to know if you did," said Wallis, with much concern. "I 'd no idea that he was so bad off as to have watchers. And I should think his own folks might take care of him amongst themselves. He ain't been sick enough to tucker them out, seems to me."

"I guess I 'm as near to being his own folks as anybody, if setting by him counts for anything," said Ezra, with a good deal of feeling. "I always thought everything of Uncle Jerry. He 's done me more kind turns than anybody else ever did, and he 's a good-hearted man, if ever there was one. He 's none of your sharpers, but he 's got the good will of everybody that knows him, 'less it 's his own children."

The three friends were leaning against the rail

of the bridge, all in a row. Ezra whittled fiercely for a minute; the hands of his companions were plunged deep into their already sagging pockets. They looked at him eagerly, for they knew instinctively that he was going to say something more. He shut his jack-knife with a loud snap, and turned and threw the bit of white pine into the noisy, rushing brook. It was only a second before it had gone under the bridge, to show itself white and light on the brown water, and lift itself as if for a leap on the rounded edge of the little fall, and disappear. Ezra's forced discretion seemed to have been thrown away with it.

"Sereny Nudd found out, somehow or 'nother, before I come away this morning, that I mistrusted about things, and she come meachin' round, wanting me not to tell; but all I told her was that I would n't have done it, if I was her, if I was going to be ashamed of it. I don't know when anything has riled me up so. Says I, right to her face and eyes, I 'm mortified to death to think I am any relation to such folks as you be, and she shut the door right in my face, and I cleared out. I 've been sorry all day I said it; not on account of her, but now she 's mad she won't let me go near the old gentleman, if she can help it, and I might have looked after him a good deal."

"What 's to pay?" asked Wallis and Parsons, eagerly; it was some time since anything had happened to them which promised to be of so much interest as this. Ezra Allen was not easily excited, and was an uncommonly peaceable man under ordinary circumstances.

"Well, if I must say it, they 've prevailed upon that poor old man to sign away his property, and I call it a burning shame."

"How long ago?" and the hearers looked at Ezra with startled countenances. Yet there could be seen a flicker of satisfaction at this beginning of his story.

"Some time in the winter," answered Ezra. "The poor creatur' has been laid up, you know, a good deal of the time, and there come a day when he was summoned to probate court, on account of that trust money he 's got for the Foxwell child'n. You know he 's guardeen for 'em, and it's been a sight o' trouble to him. He might have sent word to the judge that he wa'n't able to come and see to it, and 't would ha' done just as well three months hence, being a form of law he had to go through; but what does them plants o' grace do but work him all up, and tell him a lot o' stuff an' nonsense, until he was ready to do whatever they said. He put the power into Aaron Nudd's hands to go over and tend to the Foxwell matter;

and then they went at him again (he told me all about it in the night, though I have had an inkling of it for some time past), and they told him 't wa'n't likely he 'd ever get about again, and he was too old to look after business, and go hither and yon about the country. All he wanted was his livin', they told him, and he 'd better give them the care of things and save himself all he could, and make himself comfortable the rest of his days. Sereny Nudd is dreadful fair-spoken when she gives her mind to it, and uncle, he 's somehow or 'nother always had a great respect for her judgment, and been kind of 'fraid of her into the bargain; and he was sick and weak, and they bothered him about to death, till he signed off at last, just to get a little peace. Mary Lyddy Bryan was there at the time, a mournin' and complainin', same as she always is. Sereny won't have her about, generally, but she got her to help then, and between 'em they won him over. Mary Lyddy is always a dwellin' on being left a widow with no means, and a little family to fetch up, and her father 's always had to help her. Both of her boys is big enough to be doing for themselves, and ought to be put on to farms, or to some trades; but they 'll never do a stroke of work if they can help it."

"Did they draw up the papers just as they wanted

'em, and make the old sir sign 'em?" asked Parsons. "I should n't ha' thought he 'd been fool enough."

"Nor I, neither," replied Ezra, who was in the flood tide of successful narration; "but we know, all of us, that their father ain't what he used to be, and he was a sick man at the time. They put it to him this way: that he would have everything he wanted, same 's if 't was his own, and that he should have his say about everything just the same, — 't was only to save him trouble of the care of things, — and the way Sereny fixed it was abominable. She got him, first of all, to give Mary Lyddy her place to Harlow's Mills, where she lives, out and out, 'because,' says she, 'it may smarten up the boys, and give them some ambition, if they feel it 's their own.' Mary Lyddy always was kind of wanting, and she never see through it that Sereny was getting double what she was, she was so pleased about getting her place in her own right. Uncle, he told me he did n't want to do anything about the bank stock, and, to tell the truth, he always meant the farm for Parker; but the girls set to so about him that there wa'n't no use. Sereny said if ever her father wanted to change his mind he could do it, and make out new papers."

"After he 'd gone and give it to her, it wa'n't his to give," growled Asa Parsons. "Did n't he know that?"

"Well, I can tell you he 's been sick ever since he realized what he 'd done," said Ezra. "He said last night that it had been gnawing at his conscience that it wa'n't fair to Parker or to Mary Lyddy, neither. I stuck up for Parker, but I told him Mary Lyddy would n't be any better off if she had a million; and Sereny wa'n't far from the truth when she said he 'd always been doing for her. But as for Parker, he 'd done well enough if he had n't been nagged to death. I know he drank more 'n was good for him, and hated farm work; but there was sights o' good things about him, and he wa'n't no common fool. They 've dinned it into the old man's ears that he must be dead, they ain't heard from him for so long; but Sereny never would write to him, and the old man's eyesight 's failed him of late. He cried like a child as he lay there in bed, last night. He got hold of my hand and gripped it, and said he did n't know, till he got Mary Lyddy to read him the paper all through, once when Sereny was out to a neighbor's, that they 'd worded it so 's to leave Parker out. It gives Mary Lyddy her place, and a piece of woodland beside, that comes from her mother's folks; and everything else — this farm, and the bank stock and everything — to Sereny. She 's got as much as three thousand dollars more than her half, — grasping creatur's both

on 'em, she and Aaron Nudd is, and they 've got a young one that 's going to be worse 'n either of 'em. I thought last night that the sooner poor old uncle was laid away, down in the burying-ground, the better 't would be for him. Like 's not they 'll never trouble themselves to set up a stone for him ; but I 'll see to it myself, sure as the world, if they don't show him respect, — taking away his rights, kind as he 's always been, and a good neighbor. His only fault has been that he was too lavish. There ain't much the matter with him that I can see, except he 's distressed, and seemed to feel he was broke in his mind, and there was nothing to look forward to. They 've moved him out of the room where he always slept into a back bed-room, where there ain't room to swing a cat, and no chance for a fire. I like to have froze to death. I set up in my overcoat all night, for 't was chillier than you 'd suppose before such a mild day. He wa'n't warm enough along towards morning, and I scouted round till I got some blankets, — for there was n't nothing over him but old quilted spreads. Sereny come in in the morning, mad as fire any way, because it seems she heard us talking in the night ; but when she see them blankets, she like to have died, and asked why I did n't come to her if I wanted more bedclothes, — 't was too bad to

spill medicines all over the best she had. 'There ain't a spot on 'em, nor a brack in 'em,' said I, real pleasant, though I could ha' bit her head off. 'I remember I was with your mother when she bought 'em; 't was one of the last times she was ever over to the mills. I happened to be into Harlow's shop when she was selecting them, — she got them very cheap. I told our folks what a bargain they was for the quality; not that I pretend to be a judge of such things, but the women thought they did n't need them.' I just spoke of it to Sereny, so she 'd see I knew they were none of her buying; and I said, right before her, 'The best ain't too good for you, uncle.' "

"Well," said Henry Wallis, prudently, "I never thought I should like to take up with Sereny Nudd, for better for worse; but she may do well by her father, after all. Old folks has been known to be difficult, but she ain't done right so far as we can see."

"Done right!" exclaimed Asa Parsons. "It 's a burning shame, and I hope she 'll be met with. That 's what was going on one day last winter, when I saw that sneaking Josh Hayden riding home with Aaron Nudd. He 's a lawyer, — what there is of him, — and I suppose they got him over to do the business. I heard he 'd deeded Mary Lyddy her place."

"I don't want to think of it," said Ezra, disgustedly, "but it follows me about the whole time. I suppose I could have got out to meeting to-day, but it would have been more than I could stand to see Nudd and Sereny parade up the broad aisle. I wa'n't so beat out that I could n't have gone; one night's watching won't use me up!"

The friends now separated, for the air was growing cold and damp. Asa Parsons mentioned that his overcoat would n't do him any harm if he had it then, and he and Wallis went away together, while Ezra turned toward the other direction.

"Suppose you 'll be out to town-meeting," Wallis called after him. It was fairly amazing that nobody should have spoken about the great day, anticipations of which were in every man's mind, to a greater or less degree. Ezra Allen had not been without his hopes of running for selectman, — to tell the truth, he had looked forward all the week before to furthering his cause among his neighbors by a friendly word in season on Sunday; but his uncle's wrongs had driven his own political interests quite out of his head. He walked slowly home in the fast-gathering spring chilliness, the noise of the brook growing fainter and fainter. He suffered a slight reaction from his enthusiasm, and wished he had not spoken

so warmly against his cousins. "Mary Lyddy 's a poor dragging creatur'," he said to himself; "and as for Sereny, she 's near, and set in her own way, but she may treat the old gentleman well, for shame's sake. I don't know but I was hasty, but I don't care if I was; it wa'n't the right thing for her to do; and then, there 's Parker." By way of balancing any harm he might have done, he held his peace in his own household, and refrained from beguiling the tediousness of a Sunday evening by introducing this most interesting subject of conversation. He had a way of keeping things to himself at times, which his wife found most provoking; but he was possessed of that uncharacteristic trait of many reticent people, of telling his secrets generously and even recklessly, if he once was forced to break through the first barrier of reserve.

The next morning was clear and not cold, but the warmth and revivifying influence of the day before was not to be felt. It was commonplace New England spring weather, and had a relationship to the melting of snow and the lingering of winter which was most unconsoling. A large number of persons had taken violent colds, and the frogs preserved a discreet silence. Asa Parsons wore not only his overcoat to town-meeting, but a woolen comforter round

his throat as well; and he sneezed from time to time, angrily, as if it were a note of disapproval and contempt. There was a grand quarrel over the laying out of a new piece of road, and it was at first found very difficult to choose the town officers. There was a monotonous repetition of polling the house, and when Ezra Allen lost, at last, the coveted position of selectman, he had become so angry with some of his opponents, and so tired with the noisy war, that the glory of the occasion was very much tarnished. It was over at four o'clock, and nobody had had any dinner, except a slight refreshment of wilted russet apples and very watery and sour cider, which could be bought at abominable prices over the tailboard of one of the wagons which were fastened in long rows to the fences near the old meeting-house, which had been given over to governmental purposes.

Aaron Nudd was by no means a favorite among his townsfolk. He was very stingy, and had saved considerable money, for which it was supposed Serena Jenkins had married him. He was of the opposite party in politics to Ezra Allen, and he had been the opposing and successful candidate for the office which Ezra had lost. Aaron's wagon was next but one, and the two men unfastened their horses sulkily, without looking at each other. Ezra went home pre-

pared to believe any report of cruelty or injustice on the part of his uncle's children, and full of the intention to tell the story of their trickery in his own household. But he was not even to have this pleasure on that unlucky day. His wife asked him reproachfully, as he entered, why he had said nothing of what everybody had been talking about who went by the house, and which would have been no story at all without his own report (already much magnified) of the meanness and knavery of Serena Nudd.

The next morning Ezra resumed his business of wheelwright, from which he had taken a two days' vacation; but the excitement had been a good deal of a strain upon him, and he worked without much enthusiasm for a few hours, and about eleven o'clock laid down his tools altogether. The spoke-shave was so dull that it needed grinding, and there was nobody to turn the grindstone, and his head ached a little. He did not feel inclined to start out upon a new piece of work, and, taking a disgusted look around the shop at the disjointed limbs of various old and new vehicles, he threw off his apron, and went to the house, which was only a few rods distant along the road. Outside the shop door were stacked some dozens of wheels in various stages of decay and decrepitude, and two or three old wagon-bodies and chaise-tops were rest-

ing on the ground in most forlorn condition, as if they had been relentlessly exposed to all the winter weather. The wood-work of one new farm cart was set up on trestles, and had received its first coat of paint; but that was the only sign of any progress of the art that was carried on within. One would think, from the outward appearance of a wheelwright's shop, that it was also a repository of worn-out carriages of every description. The trade is apparently never carried on without much useless rubbish, unless one may venture the suggestion that it is necessary to have a collection of specimens showing the advances and effects of various diseases of wheels, as surgeons are furnished forth with anatomical cabinets. On the seat of an old wagon there was perched a large rag doll, and when Ezra saw it he smiled, for the first time that morning. He was very fond of his little girl, to whom the doll belonged.

He pushed open the kitchen door with some faint thrills of pleasure, for a great whiff of a well-known odor blew out through the half-opened window which he had just passed. His wife was frying doughnuts, and he did not notice at first, for the smoke and steam obscured the atmosphere, that some one was sitting at the other side of the room.

"Just in time, ain't I?" said Ezra, cheerfully;

then, to his great disgust and confusion, he saw that the guest was his cousin. "Is that you, Sereny?" he asked, in quite another tone.

"Yes, it is," said Mrs. Nudd, snappishly, "and I should think you 'd be ashamed to look me in the face, Ezra Allen. You 've been and done the best you could to take away my good name, and I don't see what harm I ever done you nor yours;" and she began to cry in a most obnoxious fashion.

Ezra gave himself an angry twitch and went over to the window, where he stood with his back to the company, and looked longingly at the safe harbor of the shop which he had just left. His wife, who was a fearful soul and who hated a quarrel, escaped with her colander full of doughnuts to the recesses of the pantry, from whence she stole a glance now and then at the others, like a distressed mouse which had doubts about venturing out of its hole. Mrs. Nudd sniffed and sobbed, and wiped her not very wet eyes with her handkerchief again and again; but still Ezra did not speak, and nothing could be more aggravating.

"Enoch Foster said, this morning," she remarked, in a broken voice, "that he supposed you was put out about the election, and Aaron's getting in ahead of you. But I wa'n't going to hear my own first

cousin spoken of no such way, and I said that you had n't nothing to do with it; you was too straightfor'ard a man. I knew you was hasty to speak, but there never was nothing mean about you, with all your faults; and I explained it as best I could, for I 'm sure I don't know no other reason. Poor old father's mind is broke more than folks think who comes in and sees him for a visit; and he 's got set upon our having got away his property from him. 'T was all his own set-out to deed it to us now in his life-time. He got kind of worried and confused a spell ago, and seemed to want to be rid of the care of it; and we made the change to gratify him. Aaron said he would n't have no such goings-on, and that he did n't want the farm nohow. He 's been desiring for a long spell to move to Harlow's Mills and go into the shoe factory; he could have had a first-rate chance any time in the boxing room, but we seemed to be pinned right down where we was, on father's account."

"You need n't have drove off Parker, then," grumbled Ezra; but though Mrs. Allen heard him in the pantry, and shook for fear, Mrs. Nudd went on complacently: —

"I 'm sure we 've always done the best we could by our folks, and by the neighbors. We ain't had the means to be free-handed, for we never knew what

was our own and what was n't. One day father 'd be real arbitrary, and gather up whatever there was, even the butter money, that anybody 'd think I might have a right to; and next thing, he would n't want to be consulted about anything. Aaron went to him one day about a bunch o' laths, when he was going to alter the hen-coop, and father give it to him right an' left, because he bothered him about it. He refused him the money, and said Aaron had made enough off from the place, and he should think he might attend to a job of that size himself."

Ezra gave a sympathetic chuckle, and his cousin wished she had left out this illustration. "I only spoke of it because some days father would have grieved hisself to death if he had n't been told something that was half the importance," she explained, in a higher key than ever. "If you had to summer and winter him I guess you 'd find out. He ain't so easy-going and pleasant as folks seem to think. I know it ain't right to talk so about my own father, that 's failed from what he used to be, but I 've got to stand up for myself, if my own relations won't stand up for me;" and at this point she cried again, more sorrowfully than before. "I do have a hard time," she said, in conclusion: "father to please; and Mary Lyddy a-dwellin' on her trials, and tellin' her

complaints, and wantin' to borrow everything I've got; and Aaron a-fussin' and discontented, and talking about going West; and Parker, he spent about all the ready money he could tease out of father. I wonder the place ain't all mortgaged, and I dare say we shall find it is. Some days, I wish I was laid in my grave, for I sha'n't get no rest this side of it."

Ezra's wife, in the pantry, was ready to cry, also, by the time she heard the end of this touching appeal, and she did not see how her husband could be so stony-hearted. She wished he would say something, and knocked two pans together for a signal, and then was dreadfully shocked by what she had done. She was not very fond of Serena Nudd, and could talk angrily about her, behind her back, at any time; but being a weak little soul, and anxious to avoid contention, when there was any danger of getting a blow herself, she was ready, being also a woman, to take her complaining visitor's part.

But Ezra shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and fumbled a button which was at the back of his collar, and which, at that opportune moment, came off and dropped on the floor. "I guess you 'll have to set a stitch in this, if you will, Susan," he said, with well-feigned indifference; and Susan came obediently out from among the pots and pans, very

shamefaced and meek. The button had rolled almost to Mrs. Nudd's feet, and when Ezra looked for it unsuccessfully, she stooped and picked it up, and handed it to his wife with a heavy sigh, and then rose to take leave.

"I shall be ready any time to watch with the old gentleman, if he needs it, or even thinks he does," remarked Ezra, as if he had heard nothing of what his cousin Serena had said; and she did not know how to answer him, though usually she was equal to the occasion. She went away in doubt whether she had won a great victory, or had been defeated; and she took the plate of doughnuts which Susan humbly offered in the old gentleman's behalf, hardly knowing what it was, she felt so unlike herself, all of a sudden. But she "came to" before she was out of sight of the house, and though she hated Ezra worse than ever, she ate one of the doughnuts with uncommon relish, and put another in her pocket.

The spring days lengthened and grew into summer, and the excitement which attended the knowledge of the transfer of old Mr. Jenkins's property died slowly away. He looked so wilted and changed by his illness of the winter that it was by no means difficult for the town's-people to believe that his mind had become as much enfeebled as his body. As for

his nearest neighbors, they saw him rarely, for he was too lame to make the short journey to their houses; and in the early summer business of the farms nobody found much time to go visiting Serena Nudd or her most unpopular husband. He was a sly-looking, faded-out little man, of no attractions, and a sneaking manner which disgusted the persons he sought most eagerly to please. It had been thought that he would favor some projects about the new road, which he frowned upon directly he was in office; and that angered the parties who were most concerned, and there grew steadily a feeling of shame and regret that he should have won so easily his prominent position in town affairs. He paid the taxes on the farm with unusual promptness, and the treasurer took notice that he had crossed out Mr. Jenkins's name from the tax-bill and inserted his own in its place. There was a good deal of sympathy felt for the old man, because he had not deserved such a miserable son-in-law. People hoped that he was treated well, but it was taken for granted, in those few weeks, that the poor old farmer was fast breaking up, and, under the circumstances, nobody could wish him to live long, since it would only involve the greater discomforts of old age, and a continued suffering of one sort and another. As for his

daughter Serena, she was making great bids for friendship, and was showing herself both generous and neighborly, in a way that much surprised her acquaintances. She spoke with great concern of her father's failing health, and some persons began to say she was good-hearted, and what a pity it was that she should have thrown herself away on such a man as Aaron Nudd. She drove old Mr. Jenkins to church one hot Sunday, when Aaron was reported to be kept at home by the expected swarming from a hive of bees; and it was certainly very kind, the way in which she helped him down out of the high wagon, and along the broad aisle to his pew. He looked round the church as pleased as a child, and seemed to enjoy the unusual opportunity of being among his friends and neighbors. The older people watched him affectionately, — he was younger than several who were there, — and many of the younger members of the congregation expected him to betray in some way his shattered wits. But he seemed to be in full possession of his faculties as far as any one could decide at that time; and when Serena ostentatiously found his place in a hymn-book, and offered it to him, he shook his head at her in great perplexity, and proceeded to search for the right page in his own copy of Watts' and Select Hymns, which was

of large type, and for years had been ready to his hand in the corner of the pew. "I 'm all right, if it was n't for my lameness," he told a half dozen of the friends who crowded about him. "I can get about a good deal better than the folks think I can, too; but Sereny keeps right after me," he added, in a lower voice to Ezra Allen, who had been more pleased than anybody to see his uncle in his accustomed seat, and who indulged a hope that now he was about again he would take things into his own hands. But the poor man stumbled on the meeting-house steps that very Sunday, and gave himself a bad strain, and passed many a long and lonely day afterward in his dark, close bedroom, in that summer weather. Out-of-doors the birds sang, and the grass grew and grew, until it waved in the wind and was furrowed like the sea. The old farmer worried and fretted about the crops, and could not imagine how the fields got on without his oversight and care. He was always calling Aaron, or the man who had been engaged to help him, and demanding strict account of the potatoes and corn and beans. He had worked day in and day out on his land, until that summer, and he was sure everything must be going to wreck and ruin without him. Aaron evaded some of his questions, he thought, and treated him like a child. If it had not

been for his lameness, he would have risen in wrath from his bed, and have dispersed the whole family like marauding chickens. Even Ezra Allen was not attentive, and this was hard to understand, though the frequent breaking of farm tools and the wear and tear of the vehicles of the town gave him more than enough to do, while he had his own farming to look after beside.

Serena grew less and less amiable, but she was what she and her neighbors called a regular driver, and she had a hard fight to get through with her every-day work. If her father demanded a long explanation of the reasons that had led to the selling of a cow, she was by no means ready to satisfy him, and to stop in the midst of everything to answer his restless, eager questions by quieting accounts of the circumstances; and as for the man who had come several times to make the bargain, he was kept out of the old farmer's hearing altogether. At last, in a desperate moment, Mr. Jenkins, like a distressed New England Lear, said that as soon as he was well enough he should go to stay for a while with his other daughter; for Mary Lyddy was always civil spoken to him, and was always pleased to see him, if other people were not. "It will be a first-rate thing to get rid of him through haying," Serena

told her lord and master that night. "I'm thankful it was his own proposal;" and then they talked over the question of her father's prompt removal to another scene of uselessness.

The next morning but one, Serena put her head inside the old man's door, and said she guessed he had better get out into the fresh air that day. Aaron was coming right in to help him. This was good news, for Mr. Jenkins had urged his daughter to believe that there was no need of his lying in bed any longer, while she had insisted that she was following the doctor's orders, and that if he stirred before the proper time he would only bring fresh disasters upon himself and his family. He found himself weak and stiff when he tried to move about, but such was his delight at being again his own master that he soon felt uncommonly strong and energetic, and sat down at the breakfast-table in the kitchen with a look of proud satisfaction.

"I'm going to be in first-rate trim for haying," he announced gravely. Aaron had swallowed his breakfast as nearly whole as possible, and had departed; and Serena was already clattering at the dishes.

"This is prime corn-cake," said the farmer. "I declare, Sereny, it tastes like it used to, — just like what your mother used to make."

"It always tastes alike to me," responded Mrs. Nudd, in a not unkindly tone. "You 're getting to be notional." Serena was not celebrated for her skill in cookery, and this compliment had touched her tenderly.

"Ain't it a good while since we have had a nice cabbage?" asked Mr. Jenkins, presently. "I suppose, though, they 're about gone. I declare, how the weeks fly by! It don't seem but a fortnight since we were getting 'em in, in the fall of the year."

"For mercy sake!" said Serena. "I believe you are losing your faculties! The idea of cabbages keeping through haying! You might as well wish for some of the Thanksgiving pies. There! I do the best I can to suit you, but it 's hard for one pair o' hands to do everything. I did expect to have help in haying time, but Aaron says he can't afford it, now he 's got the whole farm to lug."

"He 's got the whole farm to help him, at any rate," said Mr. Jenkins, blazing up into something like his youthful spirit. "He was always crying poor, and wheedling round, and you was, too, till you got the farm, and now you 're worse off than you was before. I 've always made an honest living, and stood well in the town, and I 've brought up my children, and kept my fences and buildings in good order.

I won't have such talk from you nor Aaron Nudd neither." But Serena had flown, and the old man might have relieved his mind by more just accusations without causing trouble, for there was nobody within hearing. The kitchen was hot, and the late June light was flaring in at the windows and door; it promised to be a very hot day. Mr. Jenkins felt a little tired and weak; he wished he had not said so much, and told himself again the familiar and unwelcome truth that he had had his day. He looked about the room, which did not seem natural, for some reason or other. "Sereny!" he suddenly shouted. "What's become of my chist o' drawers, — my desk? My papers is all in it. I hope you have n't got them into a mess;" and he looked around him again, puzzled and miserable. There was a noise of the pounding and creaking caused by a rolling-pin in the great pantry, and presently Serena said that he used it very little, and it was considerably in the way, and an old furniture dealer had come along and offered a good price for it, and she had sold it. She needed a new sewing-machine, and she did n't suppose he would care. She always wanted that place for her sewing-machine, right between the windows, where there was a good light.

"I am going to learn you that I won't be pulled

about by the nose in this way another day;" and Mr. Jenkins's daughter did not remember that she had ever seen her father in such a rage before. "You can tell Aaron to hunt up that man, and get my piece o' furniture back; 't was my father's before me, and it has stood in this kitchen a hundred years. I don't care what you want, nor what you don't want, nor nothing about your sewing-machine. You just go and get that secretary back, or it 'll be the worse for you. I don't see as you 've any call to act as if I was dead, right before my face. It 's a hard thing for a man o' my years to see another master over his own house, and live to see himself forgotten;" and the poor old creature, whose pleasure at being about the house again was so cruelly spoiled, shook with anger, and meant to walk out-of-door indignantly; but his strength suddenly failed, and he leaned back in his chair again. Serena had nothing further to say, and the knocking and rolling still continued. She was making a tough company of dried-apple pies for the family sustenance in the haying season. The kitchen looked strangely empty without its one handsome and heavy piece of furniture, whose dark wood and great dull brass handles had somehow given a nobler character to the room, which was the usual gathering place of the family. In Serena's mother's day the

bat-handles had always been well polished, and had many an evening reflected the brightness of the roaring great chimney-place fire. A little later in the morning, the farmer asked his daughter to fetch him the papers which had been kept carefully in the quaint corners and pigeon-holes. She feared to disobey, and for hours the old man set drearily unfolding and poring over the small basketful of worn papers which held his history and his few business records. There was a curl which his wife had cut from the head of their little child who had died, and there was a piece of the Charter Oak at Hartford, and a bit of California gold that his brother had sent home in the early days of the gold-diggings stored away with the rest, — the old man's few treasures and playthings. They were huddled together in miserable confusion, though he had always known where to put his hand on each when they were in their places.

II.

SERENA'S not very tender heart was somewhat touched at last, and she noticed how worn and old her father looked, and wished she had not sold the secretary without speaking to him about it first. She thought it was no time then to say what a good

price she had wrung out of the man who had made the purchase, and at any rate her father might insist upon putting the money in his own pocket. She was unusually good-natured all that day, and even went so far as to say that she was glad to see him about the house again. She was a good deal of a coward, as all tyrants and bullies are apt to be; and she began to be a little afraid, when her father's weakness and dependency seemed to have been replaced by a sullen indifference to both her words and actions when she came near, and a look of wounded disapproval when she left him to himself.

The next morning he said that he wanted some one to go over to Mary Lyddy's with him, and bring the horse home. Somehow, Serena felt a shameful sense of guilt and almost of repentance, as she stood in the kitchen door and watched her father drive away. It seemed as if he might have started of his own accord upon a journey from whence there could be no return. He did not turn his head after the horse had started; he had not even said good-by. There was a small trunk in the back of the wagon, an odd, ancient thing, studded with many nails and covered with moth-devoured leather; one might believe it had attained a great age before starting on this first journey, it looked so unused to travel and so garret-

like. Into it, very early in the morning, Mr. Jenkins had packed some of his few personal possessions, and his daughter looked at it again and again with suspicious eyes. "I declare, it's a dreadful thing to get to be old and past our usefulness," she said. "Who would have thought that father would have turned against me so, just for selling an old, out-o'-fashion chist o' drawers, after the way I 've tended and nursed him, and mended him up and waited upon him by inches? Well, it 's the way of the world!" And after these reflections, the rattling wagon and plodding horse and the stern, upright figure of the aggrieved old man having passed out of sight over the brow of a hill which rose beyond the house, she turned back into the kitchen again. "Father used to be a dreadful easy-going man," she said to herself, later. "I wonder how long he and Mary Lyddy will hitch their horses together. But I 'most wish I had n't let the secr'tary go without consulting him. I suppose *'t was* his right. I 'll let him stay a spell over to the Mills, and he 'll be sure to get over his huff, and be homesick and wore out with Mary Lyddy's ramshackle ways, and I 'll go over, just 's if nothing had happened, and fetch him home."

Harlow's Mills was an unattractive village, which had grown up suddenly, a few years before, around

some small manufactories. Mrs. Bryan's husband had been a very successful, industrious man, and it had been thought a most lucky thing for her when he had fallen in love with her pretty face, without waiting to see what sort of character lay behind it. He had done well in his business, and kept everything straight at home as long as he had lived; but when he died of fever, at the prime of his life, he had saved only a small property, and his inefficient wife was left to fight her way alone. She surrendered ignominiously, and had been tugged along the path of life by her friends and relatives, who grudged even their sympathy more and more. "When you've lugged folks one mile, you like to see 'em try to go the next themselves, — not sit right down in the road," Serena Nudd had said more than once, and not without reason. Poor Mary Lydia had sheltered her laziness behind various chronic illnesses, which had excused her from active participation in the world's affairs; though when anything was going forward in which she cared, for any reason, to join, it had often been noticed that she would step forward with the best. A funeral had such attractions for her that nothing short of her own death-bed would divert her attention or keep her at home. She had vast reserves of strength and will, but she passed most of

her time in an unstrung, complaining state. Her house was forlorn, and her boys had grown used to her feeble protests and appeals, and rarely took much notice of what she said except to escape from the whining and scolding as soon as they could. There was a good deal in her life which was pitiable, but still more for which one might blame her; and it was her comfortless house, with its dreary, shaded, unfruitful bit of land, to which the once busy old farmer had fled for refuge. The maple-trees that Henry Bryan had planted had grown too luxuriantly in that damp place, and the grass underneath was all in coarse tufts, mixed with a rank growth of plantain leaves, beside a fine nursery of young burdocks which that summer had started up unheeded in a corner.

Mr. Jenkins felt more and more saddened and disturbed all the way, and the drive to the Mills seemed very long and hot. He had little to say to his companion, though he sometimes commented upon the different fields and pastures that skirted the roads. One neighbor's potatoes and another's corn looked strong and flourishing; he took note of them with wistfulness. "I 'm done, — I 'm done," he said once or twice, half to himself. He stopped, at last, at his daughter's door, and while his companion took the

little trunk down from the wagon, he went in search of the mistress of the house. There was a strong odor of camphor in the darkened, close front room, and a voice asked feebly who was there.

"I 've come to stop with you for a spell," answered the old man. "I have been laid up, and not good for much of anything; and Sereny, she carried too many guns for me, and I thought perhaps you might like to have comp'ny." There was a pathetic attempt at joking which would have touched the heart of a stone, and Mary Lyddy was quick to catch at this advantage over her sister, and rose slowly from her couch. The old man's eyes were blinded at coming into this darkness from the glare of sunlight without, and he could not see a yard before him. He already felt homesick, and would have given anything if he had not brought the trunk, which was just now set down on one end, heavily, in the entry just behind him.

"I 'm real pleased to see you, though I wish you had come last week, when I could have enjoyed you more. I don't know when I have been so well in health as I was last week, but to-day I am so troubled with neurology in my head that I can hardly live. I do' know what there is for dinner. I told the boys they must pick up a lunch somehow or other, for I could n't go near a stove; the heat of it would kill

me. We will get along somehow, though," she added, more cheerfully, suddenly mindful of the man from the farm, and anxious that he should not carry back anything but a good report of her father's reception. "I declare, it does me good to see you;" and she came forward, and gave her guest, unwelcome as he had been the moment before, a most affectionate kiss. For all that, when Washington Tufts had driven away down the street, to do some errands at the stores for Sereny before he went home, Mr. Jenkins watched him sadly from the door, and felt as if he had burnt his ships behind him.

But his daughter was very cheerful all that day, and it seemed to him in the evening as if he had done the right thing. He would not look upon it as a permanent change, by any means; but what could be more likely than that, not being quite fit for work, he should come to pay a visit to his younger daughter? He imagined that everybody would wonder at his being there, and apologized for it elaborately to every one who came in. He received a good deal of attention for a time, being well known in his county and much respected; and he had long talks with Mrs. Bryan, who dearly liked conversation, and together they recalled people and events of years before, and the housewifely virtues of Mrs. Jenkins,

who had been a busy and helpful soul, of better sense and deeper affections than either of her daughters. The farmer was fond of saying "in your mother's day," when he spoke to his children; indeed, the later years of his life had been a sad contrast to the earlier, though he had not felt the change and loss half so keenly until the last few months, when he could no longer spend an almost untired strength and energy in the ceaseless round and routine of his work. Serena Nudd was not over-fond of hearing her mother's day referred to, and resented the implied superiority to her own; but during the first of the visit Mary Lyddy and her father talked about the good woman to their hearts' content, and Mr. Jenkins said that it seemed more homelike than the old place itself ever did nowadays. Serena's child was not a pleasant boy, and he tired and fretted his grandfather in a miserable way. The young Bryans kept their wrongdoings and laziness pretty well out of the old man's sight, and their mother forbore to harangue and scold them in his hearing.

The novelty and mild excitement of the visit appeared to act like a tonic upon Mrs. Bryan for a time, but at length her nature began to assert itself, and her guest at the same time began to be restless and uneasy in his new quarters. He made short excur-

sions about the town, and read the newspaper with unusual care; but he was not used to seeing a daily paper, and it was more reading than he really liked to undertake. One of the neighbors sent it to him every day, with great kindness; but though he was in many ways well treated, it seemed to him more and more that he could not bear any longer to be away from home. He could not help thinking and worrying about the farm work; he did not trust Aaron Nudd's judgment about the management of things, and he watched the street every day anxiously, in hope of seeing Serena approach in quest of him. He even lamented his impatience, and took her part against himself. But as the days went by, and she did not appear, his heart failed him; for he had not thought they would have found it so easy to get on without him. Shut up in the hot and noisy little village, and seeing every day so many people whom he did not know, he longed for the farm-house where he had spent all his life, and he was homesick for the wide outlook over the fields and woodlands, and felt strangely lost and alone and old.

Mary Lyddy became querulous and tiresome; it would have made a difference to her if she had had hopes of gain, and her father did not take long to discover that he was a burden to her as well as to Se-

rena. Mrs. Bryan had handed him the bill for town taxes, and he had looked at her with a grieved surprise. "I have n't got the money to pay it, if that 's what you mean," he said at length. "I 'm kept on short commons, I tell you. Serena was dreadful put out, one day, because the dealer that takes the butter called and paid his month's account, and I wanted part of it to pay the minister; she said Aaron had seen to his and mine together, and went grumping round the kitchen the rest o' the morning. I told her 't was the first week since I was out o' my time that I had been without a dollar in my pocket. Aaron cut considerable of a piece o' pine growth this last winter, but I never could find out what become of the money. One time he had n't got settled up, and the next time he began to squeal about its taking every cent he could rake and scrape to keep the farm above water. He flung at me about my doctor's bills once or twice; miser'ble farmer he is, any way. I have got a little money they don't know about in the North Bank, and I 'll get you some of it quick 's I get a chance to send, but I 've nobody but Aaron, and I never want to say nothing to him about it. I thought I might get into a straiter place than any I 've been in, and I 've been holding on to it. 'T ain't much, but it 'll do to bury me, if they can't find the means."

"There, don't, father! You make my blood run cold," said Mary Lyddy, fretfully. "I 'm sure you can't doubt but what we shall do what 's proper for you, dead or alive. I felt 't was a mistake all the time that you should n't ha' kept things in your own hands; but Sereny talked all of us over at the time, and — well, you should have thought more about it before you did it, that 's all I 've got to say. I shall have to get rid of this place, 'less the boys get to earning something pretty soon, for it 's more 'n I can afford to keep. I 'm worse off than before I owned it, having nobody to help along. Everything would have gone well if poor Henry had only lived;" and she began to cry as if she meant to give a good deal of time to tears, and her father took his hat and walked drearily away. It was his best hat, and he often wished for the old one, which he had left hanging on its nail at the farmhouse.

He hoped that he might see somebody from home, and looked at the wagons and teams as they passed him; until presently somebody hailed him with a cheerful "Well, uncle, you 've been and given haying the slip this year." When the old man turned, he found with delight that it was Ezra Allen, and declared that he was glad to see him. It seemed as if he had n't seen any of the folks for a month; it had

been the longest week he had ever spent in his life. "Get in, won't ye?" said the nephew, affectionately. "Why can't ye ride over to Jack Townsend's with me? I want to see him about doing a lot of ironing for my running work. I 've got three or four wagons where I can't go no further with them; and Estes is sick, and won't be able to work at blacksmithing for some weeks. I want to take hold of these things right away. I 'm about through with what little haying I do. Been a good hay year so far, has n't it?"

"I don't know much about it," sorrowfully confessed the old farmer, climbing slowly into the wagon.

"Seems to me you are as quick as an eel to what you was a month ago," said Ezra. "You look about as well as ever you did; good for ten years yet, uncle Jerry," and he started the horse at a good pace. There never was a more contented pair of relatives: the younger man had wished for just this chance to hear the particulars of the visit, and the elder one was only too glad to fall in with a sympathetic companion, who had always been kind to him, and who seemed now to have belonged to his better days.

"How d' ye like it over here?" inquired Ezra, turning round with a beaming smile to take a good look at his uncle.

"Well, fairly," answered Mr. Jenkins, without enthusiasm. "But old folks is better off at home, seems to me. Mary Lyddy does the best she knows how; but the girls don't neither of 'em take after their mother, somehow or 'nother; I don't know why it is. Sereny kept me feeling like a toad under a harrow, and seems as if I was in the way, and sort of under-foot to both houses. I done just as they wanted me 'long in the winter, and give the reins into their own hands; but they don't like me none the better for it, nor so well, far 's I can see, and I don't know what to do. I had n't been accustomed to sickness, and when I was so afflicted in the cold weather, and got down so low, I thought I 'd got about through with things. You know I 'd been ailing and doctoring some months before I had the worst spell come on. They never treated me so clever as they did the time when I was give over, and old Dr. Banks said there wa'n't no help for me. But I 've come up considerable, more 'n ever I expected, and I 've had times of feeling just like myself, of late; and I see how the land lays, and between you and me, Ezry, I wish it was different. I 've had my day, though, and I don't want to stand in the way of nobody else's chance."

"Where 's Parker? Do you get any news from

him?" asked Ezra, giving the horse a flick with his whip, putting it quickly in its socket, and taking a firm hold of the reins. He knew that his uncle was fond of a good horse, and he was very proud of this new one, and wished it to be noticed and praised.

"Don't hurry the beast," said the old man; "we 've got time enough, and it kind of jars me, to what it used, to ride fast. When I 'm after a likely creatur', such as this, that can show a good pace, I 'm satisfied. As for Parker, I ain't heard from him for hard on to eight months. He was n't prompt about writing, and I 've been wanting the girls to set to work and find out about him. Serena goes into a dreadful frame o' mind if I much as mention his name, and Mary Lyddy 's always going to do it the next day. My eyesight 's failed dreadfully; it 's better 'n it was, but none too good. I did scratch a few lines twice or three times, and send them to the last place I knew him to be in, and I directed once to the postmaster; but he has made no answer yet, so I keep a-hopin'. Parker had his faults, and perhaps I indulged him more than was good for him, but he was more like his mother 'n any of 'em. He and Sereny never got along. I don't s'pose she means it, but she 's got a dreadful nagging way. I did let him have a good deal o' money, and I don't

know but it was foolish. Parker's got a quick temper, same 's his mother had, but it ain't Sereny's kind. She gnaws and picks all day long about a thing she don't like; but Parker 'll knock ye down with one hand, and pick ye right up again with the other. They 're always warnin' me that he was onsteady, and a disgrace to his folks; but I have known many a man that has had his fling, and settled down and been useful afterwards. Parker 's got good natural ability, and I guess he 'll make his way yet if he gets the right chance."

"I never could bear Aaron Nudd, if I must say it," growled Ezra. "He was distressin' himself the other day into Henry Wallis's about being afraid all the time Parker might turn up, — poor, wandering vagabone, he called him. I 'd knocked him down, if I 'd heard him. I mean to see if I can't find where Parker is. There ain't a cousin I 've got that I ever set so much by, spite of his leanin' in wrong directions. We 've always been chums, spite of his being so much younger, — you know it, don't ye, uncle Jerry? And I 've always stood up for him; I 'm going to see if he can't have his rights if you *did* sign that paper."

The old man's voice faltered as he tried to speak. "I do' know where I could ask him to, if I did send

for him to come home now," he said. "If *I* know anything about a hoss, this one is the best you ever drove, Ezry. Where did you pick her up? Not round here, I'll make a guess," and the conversation steered bravely out into this most congenial subject to both travelers.

At ten o'clock that very morning Susan Allen, Ezra's wife, was bending over her ironing-board and bumping away with her flat-iron, when somebody suddenly came outside the window, and laid his arms on the sill and looked in. At first he seemed to be a stranger, and Susan was chilled from head to foot with fear; but she stared and stared again at the smiling face before she spoke, and finally she clapped her hands, and said, "I 'll give up if it ain't, — Parker Jenkins! I want to know if that 's you?" and this question of his identity having been decided, the young man strolled round to the door, and came in as if he had never been away.

"How 's all the folks?" he asked. "Where 's Ezra? I looked in at the shop first, but there was nobody there."

"We did n't know but you was dead," said Susan, who was much excited. "Your father has been dreadful distressed about you. I do think you ought

to have wrote him, Parker. But you can make up with him easy enough; he 'll be glad enough to see you."

The visitor had looked very solemn as he listened to the first mention of his father's name, but his expression quickly changed to a look of wild astonishment. "Do you mean to tell me father is n't dead?" he said, rising to his feet.

"Dead, no!" answered Susan. "He had a long spell of sickness, beginning in the fall of the year, and we all supposed he was breaking up; and along in the first of the winter he had a very bad time, when we give him up for certain, and there was two days and a night when they thought he might be taken away any minute; but he pulled through" —

Parker had seated himself again, and did not seem to be listening to this account. He had put his head on his arm down upon the ironing-board, and was crying like a child. Susan felt as if this were a somewhat theatrical performance, and a little unnecessary. She was vaguely reminded of his being addicted to drink, and of the story of the Prodigal Son; and then she noticed how broad his shoulders had grown, and that his coat was made of a beautiful piece of cloth, and that he was quite citified in his appearance.

"Don't take on so," she begged him nervously, after a few minutes, for it made her very ill at ease.

And the unexpected guest lifted his head presently and wiped his eyes with a handsome, bright-colored silk handkerchief. "I never had anything come over me so in my life," he said, beginning to laugh in the midst of his tears. "I must go right up to the house and see him. Serena wrote me along in the winter that they 'd give him up, and he would n't be alive when I got the letter. They did n't expect him to get through the afternoon. I never heard any more from her, and I've mourned him as dead. I wrote on to Ezra to tell me the particulars; for after finding Serena did n't write again, I got mad with her, and then I got mad with Ezra because he did n't write, and I thought you were all banded together to kick me over."

"He never got the letter," said Susan. "I hope to die if he ever did, Parker. The last letter that ever came inside this house from you was one Ezra got, saying you were going out into the mining country. You know you ain't much of a hand to write, nor Ezra neither; but of course he would have answered such a letter as that, and told you your father was living. I don't know but he 'll see him this morning. The old gentleman went over to stop with Mary Lyddy for a while."

Parker had been standing by the door for the last few minutes, as if he were impatient to be off; but he came back wonderingly into the room again, and Susan, after prefacing her remarks with "Well, I may 's well tell you first as last," embarked upon a minute explanation of the state of affairs.

The young man seemed at last to be able to listen to no more. He threw off his coat, and sat by the window in his shirt sleeves, and when he had kept quiet as long as was possible he indulged in some very strong language, and expressed feelings toward his sister Serena and Aaron Nudd that would have startled them a good deal if they had been within hearing. He was outraged at their conniving to get all the property into their own hands in his absence, and at first he threatened them with such terrors of the law that Susan began to shake in her shoes, and became as afraid of his anger as if she had been only a mole burrowing in the mountain side, which had started an avalanche downward on its path of destruction. It was a solemn scene when Parker Jenkins met his sister, early in the afternoon; but by that time Susan had become so used to excitements of this kind — her own explanations and the accompanying comments having been repeated after Ezra's return — that she had a feeling of envy when she

saw her husband and his cousin marching away toward the farmhouse. "I don't know now what it was fetched me here," Parker was saying. "I made up my mind forty times that I never would set foot inside town limits again; but I wanted to be sure everything was right and proper in the burying lot, and it seemed as if you would set some things straight that I could n't understand, any way I looked at 'em, and I wanted to let folks see I had n't quite run to seed."

Serena's face was a picture of defenseless misery when she first caught sight of her brother. She had had a long, hard morning's work already, and she felt guilty and on the losing side. Parker had passed through his unreasoning storm of rage, and had sailed into smoother but very deep waters of contempt. He said very little beyond remarking that, not having heard anything after her last letter, he had supposed that his father was dead. He announced in the course of conversation that he had done well, on the whole, and that he did not think he should return to Colorado at present.

Serena was pale and crimson by turns, and tried her best to be affectionate and conciliatory. She ventured at last to speak of her father, and to say

that somebody should go over to the Mills and bring him home that very afternoon. "We 'll have supper late, and he 'll be here by that time. You 'll find him a good deal changed, but it 's nothing to what he was in the winter," she said, fearfully.

Parker fixed his eyes on her, and presently gave a contemptuous little laugh. Ezra's excitement reached its topmost pitch.

"Serena!" said the returned wanderer, "I should think you 'd be ashamed to come near decent folks. I 've no right to boast, and I 've been a confounded fool, I 'll own, but I never set to work to cheat folks, or to sneak, or to lose folks' respect, so that I could have one more dirty dollar tucked away in the bank. As far as I can find out, you have cheated me and Mary Lyddy out of our rights, and you have treated your poor old father anything but Christian. As for Aaron Nudd, I won't have anything to say to such cattle. The writings you got from father won't stand one minute in the eye of the law, but your false pretenses and your tricks, will, and if either of you make any trouble I 'll just fix you so you 'll wish you 'd held your peace. I may have shown signs of being a scapegrace, and being gone hook and sinker; but I 'm older than I was when I went off, and though I don't make no boasts, as I say, I don't mean my

folks shall ever be ashamed of me. I 'm going over myself to fetch father home, and afterward I 'm going to stay here, and you can do as you see fit."

It was only three or four days after this that, late on a Sunday afternoon, Parker and Ezra Allen stood on the little bridge over the brook. Parker was fashionably dressed. He had attracted a good deal more attention than the minister, that day, for he had accompanied his father to church, and had received congratulations on his return from all his acquaintances. Old Mr. Jenkins was so happy that he smiled continually, and glanced round proudly at his son when he should have been listening to the sermon. It seemed to him a greater proof of the providence of God than had ever before been vouchsafed him, and he appeared to have taken, as everybody said, a new lease of life.

"Done well, out there among the mines, you said?" inquired Ezra, somewhat indifferently, though he was eager to ask a few questions before any other neighbor should join them.

"First rate," responded Parker; "though I have n't made the fortunes some do. Trouble is, you either lose all you 've got, or else you have luck, and then get picked off with a bullet from behind a

bush. We struck a good vein in a claim I had shares in, and some fellows were out there from New York wanting to buy a good mining property, and — well, I 'll tell you all about it some day ; but the end of it was, I sold out to them for twenty-five thousand dollars. I think they chuckled over it lively, and thought they 'd made an awful good thing out of me ; but I said to myself that a bird in the hand 's worth two in the bush. You see they had n't been taking out much of any ore each side of us. I had some thoughts of going into business with a fellow I know in New York. We come on East together ; but I don't know what I shall do. It seems pleasant at the old place, and father he holds on to me. I don't take much to farming, but I 've thought a good many times what a chance there is to raise cranberries up here in the swamp. I 've got forty notions. I'll wait a while before I settle down anywhere. I can afford to."

" Aaron Nudd told Asa Parsons yesterday that he guessed he should go over to Harlow's Mills quick 's the crops were in, and take a place in the boxing room at the shoe factory they 've been urging him to fill," said Ezra, with a wise smile.

" I 'd just as soon he would, for my part," said Parker. " They 're both soft-spoken and meaching

as any two you ever saw, and Sereny makes excuses about things from morning to night, worse than poor Mary Lyddy ever thought of. I don' know, but I never did seem to have a right sort o' feelin' for the girls. But it pleases me to death to see how satisfied the old gentleman is. It kind of makes me feel bad, Ezra. I guess I shall steady down for good; but I 've seen something of hard times and raking round, for a fellow of my age. I ain't one to talk religious, but I 'm going to look after father; he does set everything by me, don't he? And a more homesick man I never saw, than he was sitting in the front door over there to Mary Lyddy's. He 's got quite a notion, since I spoke of it, of setting out a lot of cranberries. I pointed out to him how well the land lay for it, and the springs watered it just right. I 've seen a good deal of 'em down towards the Cape. I was there some time, you know, when I first cleared out from home. But there, I 'm a roving fellow by nature. I sha'n't make any plans yet a while."

"There was an awful sight of water come down out of the swamp this last spring," said Ezra, turning to look at the brook. "I 've always heard cranberries was an uncertain crop, and don't you go throwing away your means till you know what you 're about. But you stick to the old gentleman, Parker;

if ever I pitied a man in my life, it was him, this summer."

It was soon observed how Mr. Jerry Jenkins had improved in health and spirits since his son's return. He resumed his place in society, and entered upon such duties as fell to his share with pleased alacrity. He was complimented on his recovery, and though some grumbling people, who always chose to be on the off side, spoke with pity of the Nudds, and expressed a sympathy for Aaron's having undertaken the farm only to be ousted, other people thought of them with scorn. However, worldly prosperity is one of the surest titles to respect, and after it was known that Aaron had bought an interest in one of the shoe-manufacturing companies at Harlow's Mills he was looked up to as much as he deserved, at any rate, and possibly more. Some people who knew him held him up as an example of its being worth while to save and be thrifty; but Ezra Allen and others of his way of thinking could not use hard enough language to suit themselves, whenever his name was mentioned. Serena was much more popular in the village than her sister. She dressed conspicuously, as she thought became her station, and she took an active part in church matters, being very

efficient in the sewing society and the social relations of the parish. She assented emphatically to all the doctrines, and insisted upon the respectability of the Christian virtues; but it must be owned that she practiced very few of them which related to the well-being and comfort of other people. She and Aaron and their boy drove out to the farm occasionally, in a shiny top-buggy, to see her father, and such visits were outwardly successful and harmonious.

At the farm itself life went on smoothly. Mr. Jenkins had been troubled at first with many fears, when he found that Serena was really going to depart early in the fall, after her brother's return, and he could not forbear some expressions of wonder at her sudden change of feeling in regard to farming. She constantly said that she had never liked it, that it was a dog's life for any woman to do the housework on a large farm; and her father only replied that her tune had changed a good deal within a year. He took a long breath as he saw her go away in a heavily laden wagon, which preceded the team in which her household goods were being moved to the Mills. She had waited until the last minute, as if she feared that some treasures might be abstracted from the load. "She 's about stripped the house," said Mr. Jenkins, with a chuckle, as he came back into the kitchen;

"but we 'll get along somehow, Parker. I 've done the best I could by her, I know that!"

Parker chuckled in his turn. "She 's an awful grabber," said he. "I 'm hanged if I did n't catch her down cellar this morning fishing into the pork barrel; she did n't hear me coming, and she was started, and let a piece drop, and it sent the brine all up into her face and eyes."

"It can't be possible that new barrel is so low as that a'ready," said the old man. "I guess she had made a good haul before you come. Well, I 'm glad, I 'm sure. I should n't want any child o' mine to be without pork. And there *was* times Sereny was right down clever and pleasant spoken. I don't blame her for wanting to be where there is more going forrard, if she takes a notion to it."

As for Parker Jenkins, he settled down on the old farm, as many another New Englishman has done, after two or three voyages at sea, or long journeys in quest of wealth to California or Texas or the Western country. He looked upon himself as being much more a man of the world than his neighbors, and his consideration for his old father was most delightful. The housekeeping went on well enough under the auspices of a cousin, a good, sensi-

ble woman, who was set adrift just in good time for these two unprotected men by the death of her own father, who had been for some years dependent on her care. It was soon known, however, that the chief reason of young Jenkins's contentment with so quiet a life was his attraction toward a pretty daughter of his neighbor, Asa Parsons, who was only too ready to smile upon so pleasant and good-looking a person, while her father and mother were mindful of his wealth.

So we leave the old farmer, no longer feeling cast off and desolate, to live out the rest of his days. He forgot even the worst of his sorrows in that unhappy winter and summer. It seemed as if most of them had been fanciful and connected with his illness. Serena was apt to be reminded oftener and oftener, as he grew older, of how impossible he found it to get on comfortably without his old secretary, and she came to regret deeply that her love for gain had allowed her to part with it, when the craze for old furniture reached Harlow's Mills in its most unreasoning form, and a piece of furniture that could be called centennial was a credit to its owner.

The old man often said that his illness had broken him down; and that he had never been the same man since. Those of his neighbors who had known his

sorrows, and the pain which had been harder to bear than the long sickness itself, were glad that this blessed Indian summer had come to him to warm him through and through, and smile upon him in the late autumn of his life's year.

Heaven only knows the story of the lives that the gray old New England farmhouses have sheltered and hidden away from curious eyes as best they might. Stranger dramas than have ever been written belong to the dull-looking, quiet homes, that have seen generation after generation live and die. On the well-worn boards of these provincial theatres the great plays of life, the comedies and tragedies, with their lovers and conspirators and clowns; their Juliets and Ophelias, Shylocks and King Lears, are acted over and over and over again.

A NEW PARISHIONER.

It was about half-past ten o'clock in the forenoon, and the time of year was late September. Miss Lydia Dunn was busy in her kitchen, where the faded sunlight lay across the floor, and the after-breakfast work was beginning to give way to the preparations for dinner. Miss Dunn had lived alone through a good many years, but, to use her own favorite remark, she always treated herself as if she were a whole family.

"I found myself living at the pantry shelves, quick as mother died," she said. "It did n't seem to be worth while to set a table and get a lot of dishes about just for one. I got so I stopped the baker every time he come by, and the end of it was I did n't eat any oftener than I could help. I took to being low in my mind, and thought I wa'n't ever going to be any more use in the world; and I was always reading some yaller old sermon books, that I never should if I had been well; it seemed as if they

had been laying about the house hoping to get a chance to gnaw somebody, for they worked me up dreadfully. Mother and I had lived together so long that I missed her, — seemed as if I could n't never get used to living alone; but at last it come to me what part o' the trouble was, and I set right to, and from that day to this I 've given myself three good regular meals every day. I tell you, you must feed folks same as you do creaturs, if you want to get any kind o' work out of 'em."

It was certainly a blessing to other people that Miss Dunn had come to this wise decision, for, after the death of her mother, who had needed all her daughter's care in the later years of her life, she had always been more than ready to use her freedom and strength and good sense in other people's behalf. She had a great deal of sound discretion, and a quick insight into men and things on which she valued herself not a little, as well she might. If she had been bad-tempered she would have been feared, for she had a quick wit and a bitter impatience with shiftiness and deceit; but her bark was worse than her bite, and one after another of her neighbors and townspeople were helped by her over hard places in their lives, and every year they grew more strongly attached to her. It is true that she was often thought

a little hard, and that she gained the ill-will of some of her associates whose lives were not wholly spent in following the paths of rectitude. She sometimes felt sorry that there was nobody who belonged to her, or who really loved her because they were of the same flesh and blood. It is a rare thing to find a woman of her age in a New England village who has no near relations; for when there was less intercourse with the rest of the world than nowadays, and families were larger, the people were apt to be closely connected by frequent intermarriages, and it made a community of interest and a clannishness which had many advantages in spite of its defects. Now that the young people go from the farming communities to the shops and factories of the larger towns, they are surer to marry strangers and foreigners than their old schoolmates and playmates, and the state of society in these latter days in such a town as Walton is pretty well disintegrated.

Miss Dunn's grandfather had been the minister of Walton for forty years. That of itself gave her a right to assert herself in parish matters, and her inherited love of reading and thinking helped her to look oftener at the principles and causes of things than at their incidents and effects. The elder people of the town still turned back with reverence to the

deeds and opinions of old Parson Dunn, and gave an honored place in their councils to his upright and straightforward granddaughter.

On this Friday morning she felt uncommonly well and active, and had been scurrying about her house ever since she had waked, sweeping and dusting, and putting things to rights generally. She remembered her mother's saying that all out-doors always seemed to try to get under cover before cold weather, and she angrily threw away the collections of dust and lint which she swept up in one room after another. When she had finished her own room she came out, bringing the broom and dust-pan and duster all at once, and before she began to get dinner she stood for a minute before the small glass in the case of the kitchen clock. The big gingham handkerchief was still tied over her head, to keep the dust off, and she took a good look at herself.

"You 're getting along in years, that 's a fact, Lyddy Dunn," said she, good-naturedly; and then she sighed, and put away the handkerchief in its drawer, and went forward with some preparations for dinner.

The house in which she lived was one that her grandfather had bought in his last days, and in which his son had lived after him. There was no village in

Walton, at least in that part of it, but farm joined farm, and there was no waste land. The main road of the town traversed a long ridge from end to end; the old church stood at the very top, blown by all the winds of heaven, like a ship on the high seas, and on the southern slope, close at the road-side, was Miss Dunn's house.

The front of it faced the south, and the front door opened into a prim little garden, where some sheltered hollyhocks and china asters still lingered; beyond was an orchard, where many of the old trees had died or been blown down, and had been replaced by young ones. The leaves were falling fast now, but nothing held on better than the apple and lilac-leaves, and these were growing browner, and rustling louder when the wind blew, day by day. Miss Dunn was very fond of her house. The main part of it had two rooms on each floor; but the lower roof of it, that covered the big kitchen and down-stairs bedroom and the great kitchen-chamber, was older than the other, and was gambrel-shaped, and had for its centre an enormous chimney, that was, as it should be, the warm heart of the house.

The outer kitchen door opened to the road in a most hospitable fashion, and some smooth gray flagstones, like a stray bit of sidewalk, led along under

the kitchen windows as far as the front gate. Miss Dunn suddenly bethought herself to sweep these, and brought her second-best broom. There was a pleasant fragrance of faded leaves in the air; the sunshine was very warm, and the maple leaves seemed to have fallen too soon on the thick green grass, which still looked as fresh as if it were June. In the lowlands far below there was a most lovely blur and haze with the misty air and the colors of the trees; the sky was cloudless but a little dim, and the snowberry bushes rustled so over the fence, in the breeze that came past the corner of the house, that our friend looked around at them as if somebody had spoken. A little stick, that was shaped like some thin, twisted mockery of a human being, was lying against the kitchen door-step, as if it had tried to climb in and had failed; and Lydia Dunn stooped to pick it up, and perched it on the outside window-sill, where it stood with one foot crooked into the little staple to which the blind was sometimes hooked, and seemed to look into the kitchen wistfully.

Miss Dunn smiled as she looked at it, and had a feeling flit over her that something was going to happen; there was an uncanny look about the strange bit of a lilac bush. She caught the sound of an approaching footstep, and as quick as one of the leaves

that were flittering about at her feet she went back into the house again. She knew well enough the familiar figure that was still some distance away down the road, and was sure that she was to have a visit. She was much attached to Jonas Phipps, and quite dependent on his assistance in her housekeeping, but she always felt a little antagonistic and on the off-side of things when he first made his appearance.

"Of course he must put into port here for his dinner, when I 've had a busy forenoon!" she said angrily, and began to change the kettles about on the stove; and she whisked the tea-kettle over to the sink as if she were putting it in jail for its sins, but it went on singing cheerfully, as if it had a good conscience.

Presently the latch clicked, and Mr. Jonas Phipps came in at the door, closing it softly after him; and as he felt at once that unmistakable lack of welcome which was not unusual, he dropped his hat on the floor beside the chair he dropped himself into, and took a long breath to show that he was much fatigued. He was a lame man, and there was something appealing about him, as well as something indescribably shrewd and quick, — the helplessness of a wounded and hampered fox or other cunning creature, that has not the physical strength to make the best use of its instincts.

"There, do spudge up a little, Jonas," said Miss Lydia, moving to and fro about the kitchen as fast as she could. "You remind me of an old limp calico bag that's hung up against the wall, — nothing to take out of it, and every chance to put in."

Jonas brightened up at once, and sat erect, as if his hostess had furnished him with a backbone.

"You always have your joke," said he, chuckling. "Ain't nothing I could do for you to-day, I expect?"

"I'm about out of kindling wood," said Miss Dunn, doubtfully. "I suppose you know that as well as I do. I thought you were going to get Otis's boy to help you, and cut me up a good lot of small wood some time this week. You'd better stop, now you're here, — though to-morrow will do just as well, and you can come earlier in the forenoon."

"To-morrow and Monday — I've got to be off both them days," said Jonas, not without pride. "You'll have to take me when you can git me, for once;" and putting on his much-battered hat he shuffled toward the door that led out to the woodshed. "Have you heard — I s'pose you have — that Henry Stroud, old Ben Stroud's oldest son, has come back, and is stopping over to Whitehouse's tavern? He was over here driving about yesterday afternoon, and

he stopped to have some talk with me. I had an errand over Donnell's way to help him get in his cabbages, but they'd got them all in before I got there. I thought it was Thursday he wanted me, but when I got there he said it was Wednesday;" and Jonas was silent, as if he wished to respectfully give place to the scolding Miss Dunn commonly furnished him with at such confessions of his laziness.

But she merely laughed, and then asked, "What's he here for? He can't think that anybody is in distress to see him."

"I don't know what he come for, unless he wanted to look round his old haunts. He bespoke me to go up to his father's place with him to set things to rights in the burying lot. I told him I was n't much of a hand for such things now, 'count of my lameness, but I'd do what I could. He was real friendly and free-spoken, and knowed me right away. Him and me's about of an age, — sixty-two in the month of January next;" and Jonas went slowly out to the woodshed, and began to chop the large sticks of pine into kindlings with leisurely blows, as if there were no hurry about either that or anything else.

"Well, I do declare!" said Miss Lydia Dunn. "I wonder what will happen next!" She longed to question Jonas further, but she did not; and later,

when the soup that she had been warming for her own dinner was in readiness to be eaten, she carried out a comfortable bowlful to him, and set it down without a word.

"Now I call that real clever of ye," said Mr. Phipps. "I was just 'lowing I'd better be getting home to my dinner," — which was a great lie, since he had been sniffing the fragrance of the soup and expecting this provision eagerly for at least half an hour.

"I suppose Henry Stroud must have aged a good deal?" she asked, lingering for a minute in the doorway.

"Not so much as you might suppose, seeing he's been gone thirty-five years, — no, forty years it must be, or rising forty. It was the fall after his father died, and Henry was out of his time the spring before. Well, he's got the ginooine Stroud looks; he's featured for all the world like the old man. I know it was forty years sence he died, because that was the year we moved over to the Ashby place, — fork of the roads as you go to Knowles's mills. The house is been gone this gre't while."

"There, your soup'll all get cold, Jonas," said Miss Dunn, impatiently, and at once retreated to the kitchen, fearing that the accounts of the changes of

residence of the Phipps family might otherwise be continued all the rest of the afternoon. Jonas liked nothing better than to tell long stories, involving infinite ramblings and details, to any audience he was able to muster.

That evening Miss Dunn stood looking out of the window down the road, noticing the lights in the houses. She always had a fancy for sitting a while in the twilight, after supper, which came early at this time of year, when the days were growing so short; and before she lit her lamp she liked to take a survey of the neighborhood and of the sky. The stars were bright and the weather was satisfactory, but from one of the three houses which were in sight there was an unusual radiance, and our friend saw at once, to her surprise, that there was a lamp in the best parlor. Nothing could be more amazing than this, and at first Miss Dunn thought that some member of the family had gone into the room on an errand, it being used as to its closet for a treasure chamber.

"I hope that old Mr. Singer has n't been taken with one of his bad ill turns," she said to herself, anxiously. "I know they always keep some spirit in that closet." But the light shone steadily on like a beacon, until there was no room for doubt that the Singers had company to tea.

At last Miss Dunn composed herself to her evening's work of knitting and reading together, and resolutely drew and bolted the close shutters and lighted the lamp. She was very fond of reading, but there was only a small harvest of books to be reaped in Walton, and she was just then working her way through a dull memoir of an injudicious and unhappy man who had mistaken his calling and tried to preach. The book was written by some one who ought to have profited by this sad example; and Miss Dunn, who knew a good book when she saw it, but would usually rather have a dull one than none at all, soon read the less and knitted the more, until the leaves of the volume fluttered up unheeded, and she lost her place without observing it. She really had too much to think about, herself, to give her mind to other people's thoughts. Her excitements and pleasures were like the pasturage that sheep find near the sea; like those delicious nibbles close to the rocks, which have a flavor that no inland field can give to its plentiful grass blades. Henry Stroud had come back. He had once shown a great liking for her, when they were boy and girl, which she had disdained and her family disapproved. More than this, which was a half-forgotten memory, at that very moment an unknown company was assembled under

her neighbor's roof. What dismal tale of a life that had made its failures through stupidity could wile her mind from such diversions? It was difficult to even guess at the reasons that had led to Mr. Stroud's return. His history was little known to his old acquaintances, except that at one time he had been very rich in South America, and had afterwards failed in his business. And after saying to the subject of the memoir that he was an old dromedary, if ever there was one, Miss Lydia Dunn gave herself up to reflection, until she was so sleepy that she could hardly stumble off to bed. The lights were not out even then at the Singers'.

Early the next morning, Mary Ann Singer came up the road with a little pitcher to borrow some yeast, and Miss Lydia gave her a cordial welcome.

"We 're sort of behindhand this forenoon," the visitor said, "for we had company last night."

"I noticed the best room was lighted up," said Miss Dunn, with the full expectation of hearing all about it.

"You see, just before tea we saw a buggy drive up, and a stranger come in and asked to see the folks. I thought he was an agent or something, but it was a Mr. Stroud, who used to live here when he was a boy. He has been most all over the world, and he 's

come back to see the old place. I just wish you could have heard him talk; it was splendid. He says he don't know but he may settle here,—for summers, at any rate. His health 's broke down, being in hot climates, and he said two or three times he did n't mean to do any more business. I guess he 's rich; he looked as if he had means. He inquired for you, and said he was going to call and see you."

"Much obliged to him," said Miss Dunn, grudgingly.

"He 's stopping over to Whitehouse's tavern," said Mary Ann. "I never saw anything better than the clothes he had on, and everything about him spoke of wealth. He said he had been to see the minister, and he meant to do something for the church, on account of his mother's being a member."

"More 'n ever his father was," said Miss Dunn. "I ain't going to say anything 'gainst Henry Stroud without having seen him these forty years; but he wa'n't much thought of as a young fellow, and his father cheated my poor old grandfather out of about all he had, except this place. I don't like the breed; but then, as I say, I ain't going to run a man down I don't know."

"He seemed to be religious," said Mary Ann, who was unwilling to have the glory of her guest tarnished

in this way; and Miss Dunn responded that religion ought to make some difference, if it was the real kind; after which young and inexperienced Miss Singer went away with the yeast, somewhat crest-fallen.

"Guess they must be going to bake Sunday, if they have n't got their bread a-going yet," thought Miss Dunn. "I 'd 'a' put it to rise after he went off, last night, if it had been me; but I suppose they were all so betwattled they did n't know which end they was on. I should think it would be a lesson to 'em to air out that south setting-room once or twice a month. Between being scared of the dust in the summer and not using it after the cold weather comes, the air don't get changed three times a year. And come to heat it up with an air-tight stove!"

The next day being Sunday, and the weather being fair, there was an unusually large congregation in the church; and the news of the stranger's coming having flown far and wide, all eyes were ready to follow him, as he walked up the aisle behind the minister to the parsonage pew. The minister's wife betrayed a consciousness of being in unaccustomed society; and when the guest and the parson both waited to usher her into the pew, it was most annoying to stumble and almost fall over the crickets, on

the way to her seat. Her face was very red, as she picked herself up, and even the children all looked that way as they heard the loud and sudden noise.

Mr. Stroud listened intently to the sermon. He was a good-looking man, but he had a difficulty in looking you straight in the eyes, and he was dressed in a way that his former townspeople could not fail to admire. And when the service was over, and the Sunday-school was assembled, Mr. Peckham, the minister, called upon Brother Stroud to lead in prayer; and Brother Stroud prayed long and eloquently, greatly to the approval of his hearers. It was really very pleasant to find that a man so distinguished in his appearance had so good a memory for his old friends. He seemed to remember everybody who remembered him, and was always ready to remind his old acquaintances of things that had happened before he went away, while he spoke of the departed members of the parish to their living connections with much interest and sympathy. On that first Sunday there was a great loitering about and hand-shaking; in fact, there was not the usual hurry to get the horses unfastened and to start for home. Miss Dunn said to herself often, in those first days, that she could understand the young folks running after him, but she should think the old ones,

that had known him root and branch, would rather wait a while. She could not explain even to herself the feeling of antipathy that rushed over her at the first sight of him. She grudged all the deference and civilities that were shown him, and yet she was obliged to acknowledge that he deserved consideration, and that he was fine-looking and had a good manner, — "a way with him," most of the people said. He seemed disposed to be very friendly and generous. The young people admired him a good deal, and from the very first he received great attention and hospitality.

Mr. Peckham was more delighted with this new parishioner than any one else, for he saw in him the promise of help for some of his cherished projects. His predecessor had been an old-school parson, preaching sound and harmless sermons twice on every Sunday; exchanging with his brother ministers with due regularity and suitable infrequency. Old Mr. Duncan had been much loved and respected. The joys and sorrows of his congregation rarely were disconnected from him; for he was a cheerful soul, most fatherly and kind, and was not instinctively set aside entirely to the performance of ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies. Under his care the church and parish existed in a most comfortable fashion, and the aver-

age of things was kept up year after year. It was somewhat of a shock to the parishioners to find that Mr. Peckham considered all these years unfruitful, and the revival which followed his teachings, or led them, in the first winter of his settlement, seemed to cast blame, by contrast, on the orderly progress of the former additions to the church membership. Mr. Peckham was an earnest, excitable, self-denying little man, though his self-denials were often in furtherance of his own selfish ends. He was ambitious and ascetic, and he was apt to be dyspeptic and low in his mind, which he and his parishioners occasionally mistook for anxiety and discouragement over the wickedness and willfulness of this world in general. He liked to have a good deal going on, though he bewailed the exhaustive nature of a clergyman's work; and just now he was trying hard to get the people of his parish to build a vestry, or small chapel-like building, for the benefit of the Sunday-school and of evening meetings.

But the slow old farmers were not disposed to move in a hurry. They were too tired and sleepy to go to any meetings after dark, especially when they lived far from the church, as most of them did; and unless there was something that really promised a sufficient reward of excitement and interest, they

held their evening meetings at home. They had an unexpressed conviction that the large attendance at the revival meetings of the winter before could not be expected to last, though Mr. Peckham were never so eloquent. One old man, who was rarely absent from his pew on Sundays, from one end of the year to the other, said impressively to his neighbor, as they unfastened their horses from the long, well-gnawed hitching-rail at the back of the church, "I don't see, Silas, why there 's any need we should build a second-sized meetin'-house, for the good o' the six or eight women folks who goes reg'lar to the evening meetin's. There 's double the expense for heatin' the two buildin's every Sunday, and long 's they always had the Sabbath-school in the meetin'-house, I don't see why they can't continue," — which was very old-fogyish doctrine to the minds of some young people, and particularly to the mind of Mr. Peckham.

Sometimes the minister had felt himself to be unappreciated and mistaken, because his people balked like unruly horses, and would not follow him in the carrying out of his cherished plans, and so he welcomed this sympathetic and apparently rich stranger with open arms. He could not resist saying that it was sometimes hard for a man who had had a wider

outlook over the world to suit himself to the limited ideas of a country parish. If the truth were known, he had been born and brought up in much the same sort of a community; but he had been a fly on the wheel of a large theological school, and imagined himself to be the possessor of a far greater knowledge of the world and of human nature than is apt to fall to the lot of most men, especially clergymen. It is a strange fact that the training of that profession aims so seldom at a practical acquaintance and understanding with the fellow-creatures whom it is empowered to direct and advise. The theories which are laid down in books are often as dangerous for the clergyman to follow as for the physician.

Mr. Stroud had accepted an invitation to spend a few days at the parsonage, and that evening he opened his heart to the minister in a gratifying way, and spoke freely of his aims and projects.

"I have been a busy man until this last summer," he said; "but I have had a serious illness, and my physicians ordered me to free myself from all business cares. As I have told you, I am alone in the world; and having to leave New Orleans for a colder climate, I did not know at first which way to turn. I have always had an inclination to return to my boyhood's home, if merely to pay a visit to the hills and

fields, and I must confess that I was quite unprepared for the affection that overcame me at the sight of the old places and faces. I do not think that I have much time to live, and I have made up my mind to stay here and make it my home for the present, at any rate. I have had an eventful life, and the repose of such a place as this is eminently soothing. I am much touched by the interest that my coming seems to have aroused, and I shall take pleasure in trying to prove myself a friend to these good neighbors, and a worthy member of your church and parish."

There was a good deal of dignity about Mr. Stroud, and a deep tone of humility and pathos when he spoke of his loneliness, and of his almost ended life, and his desire to make the most of his last days, which nearly overcame the little minister, and he grasped his new parishioner's hand.

"I foresee a strong helper in you, my dear sir," he said softly, "in the good work I am trying to do. I hope you will command my services as pastor and friend." And a league was formed between them.

As the autumn days went on, Mr. Stroud became a familiar sight, as he drove or walked slowly along the country roads. His expedition with Jonas Phipps

to the family burying-ground on the old Stroud farm had resulted in his spending much money in the fencing and grading of it, and the broken and fallen stones were replaced or put to rights carefully. It happened that the present owners of the farm had built a new house, and were living more comfortably than most people in Walton, and the arrangement was made that Mr. Stroud should go there to board. Mrs. West, the farmer's wife, was much courted and questioned by her acquaintances; and being a somewhat sentimental soul, as well as a lover of a good story, she had many an interesting fact to communicate. All the neighbors knew how many newspapers Mr. Stroud took, and how many letters he had to answer; what beautiful shirts he wore, and how he gave next to no trouble, and hardly ever could bear to speak of his wife, and that he liked a dinner of boiled fowls better than most anything, and every day went down to the burying lot, as if it were all he had in the world. In society he was a very agreeable man; he talked well, though he was rather pompous, and it became the fashion to defer to him upon any questions of the outside world's affairs.

Everybody followed this leader but Miss Lydia Dunn. Strange to say, she liked him less and less; she was prejudiced to an unwarrantable degree. It

made no difference to her that he made long and eloquent prayers; that he was going to give a new library to the Sunday-school, and had spoken of her as the proper person to select it in company with the minister. He had called upon her within a week or two of his arrival in town, and from the minute she gave him the first steady look out of her sharp-sighted eyes, and he turned away, a little embarrassed, to admire the view from the windows, she would join in none of the praise of him with which the air was filled, and listened to the petty gossip about his acts and affairs with an ill-concealed impatience. She doubted him, she did not know why. She reproached herself, and fought the feeling she had toward him most bitterly at first; but it was of no use. She feared that the townspeople thought she cherished the old grudge against the name, and hated him for his father's sins; but dislike and distrust him she certainly did, and she could not deceive other people or herself.

It is unnecessary to say that she was in the minority, for all Walton treated him like a king. His money seemed to be at everybody's service, when it suited his pleasure to hear the hints with which his ears were filled. He helped one farmer to lift a mortgage, with which the recklessness of a dissipated

son had burdened him; he visited more than one poor old soul, and left a bank-note in her hand when he said good-by. He found a cousin of his mother living alone, very feeble and poor, in a dilapidated house in a distant part of the town; and he had the house repaired, and hired a strong young woman to take care of things, with the assurance that he would be responsible for all bills. He came forward liberally with his subscription to every good work that was undertaken, whether religious or secular, and people began to wonder how Walton had ever got on without him.

The announcement of his crowning piece of generosity came just before Thanksgiving. Jonas Phipps, whom Miss Lydia Dunn had carefully engaged to come early on the Monday morning to aid her in the severer duties of house-keeping, came loitering down the hill about eleven o'clock, as if nobody in the world were in the least hurry. Miss Lydia had been in a blazing rage with him for at least three hours, and received him in ominous silence; but he sat down, and dropped his hat beside him, and began to rub his lame leg diligently.

"I do' know 's I 'm going to be good for anything this winter," he whined dolefully; and Miss Dunn snapped him up with exceeding promptness: —

"Folks would be astonished if you was!"

"I hoped you would n't lay it up against me for my being late this morning," he apologized. "I should ha' got here before eight, but they hailed me from the parsonage. Mr. Stroud, he was there a'ready, and they said they were going to run the lines for the new vestry as soon as the men come from Walpole."

"What new vestry?" asked Miss Lydia, coming out from the pantry with a dish in her hand, ready to forget all private grievances in hearing this interesting news.

"Then you ain't heard that Mr. Stroud is going to build one? Well, I was only acquainted with the facts this morning. I found I could be o' some use, and I s'posed you would n't be very particular about having of me round until you were about through with the washing."

"Don't you know I never wash the Monday of Thanksgiving week?" and Miss Dunn stood ready again to fight her own battles. "You know just as well as I do that I wanted you here early, and now I 've been so put back in my work that I 'm ready to say I don't want you to show yourself inside my doors again. I can't be so bothered and fretted. You 're worse than ever you were, and there 's no disguising it."

Jonas gave a heavy sigh. "It 's going to be a real ornamental building, I heard some of 'em say. It 'll set in the far corner of the lot, between them two balm-o'-Gilead trees. Mr. Stroud was saying he should have liked to get into it this winter, but winter plastering is always a-cracking. They 're going to haul the stone for the foundation from Beckett's quarry, and they 'll do that right off. They 'll be getting jealous of us over to Raynham. Gives like a prince, don't he? I tell you, we 're awful fortunate to have such a man come among us. Mis' Peckham was saying yesterday, when I was over to the parsonage, that he 'd give some kind of a hint to the minister about a new communion service."

"The old one 's good enough," barked Miss Dunn. "I ain't one that wants to do away with all the old associations. And, for my part, I don't like to see anybody *too* good. My father always used to say, 'When you see anybody too good, look out for 'em.' I don't know anything against Henry Stroud, but he ain't got the mean Stroud look out of his face, if he has got rich and pious."

"I thought 't was right to go accordin' to Scriptur'; 'By their works ye shall know 'em,'" Jonas suggested with considerable spirit; but he was doomed to have his loyalty quenched, for Miss Dunn retorted

that he had better be meditating on that verse for his own good.

"But I ought to be ashamed of twitting you or throwing disrepute on anybody," said the good woman. "And I tell you *honest*, Jonas, I wish I had a more Christian feeling about that man. I know folks says it 's jealousy, and that I ain't able to forget his father's cheating my grandfather; but if I 'd liked him, and believed he was a straightforward man, I never would have thought of keeping any old grievances. There ain't any of us but has lived down some of our old sins we 're ashamed to think of now, and it 's fair to look at a man as he is, and not go raking up old matters. It seems to me as if he was kind of buying his way into heaven out of his pocket, and as if he liked to be king of his company, and the big man of the place, now he 's come back to it. I don't like the looks of him; but as for the good he does, that 'll stay after him."

"You always do have good judgment," said Jonas. "I can't say I got the measure of him the first time I see him. He had a kind of meaching cast o' countenance, though you can't tell by the looks of a toad how far he 'll jump. But when you come to see how he spends his money right and left, and the good he does with it, and hear how he leads in prayer, I don't

see how anybody can speak agin him. Miss Singer said it fetched the tears right out o' her eyes to hear him lamenting his sins as he does in the evening meeting, as if he was the wickedest man there."

"Perhaps he 's only telling the truth," said Miss Dunn, and Jonas rose in indignation.

"I don't see how you can talk so on-Christian!" he said. "But there," he added, in a milder tone, "we all have our feelin's about such things, and I do' know but what it 's as well to be honest about 'em." Jonas could not help being mindful of Miss Dunn's kindness and generosity and patience, which had lasted year in and year out; for his slender fortunes would be slenderer still without her assistance. He and his mother, a very old and almost helpless woman, lived in a house that was one of the most ancient and shiftlessly kept of any in that region, and Jonas hardly ever descended the hill toward it from Miss Dunn's without some plate or basket of food, or other help to the housekeeping. Beside this lame man and the woman of nearly ninety years, there was a little orphan niece of Jonas's, who was growing up under that cheerless roof. There were so few really poor people in Walton that great capital was made of these; and the sewing society sewed for them, and the church, of

which old Mrs. Phipps had been a somewhat unsatisfactory member, paid their rent, and some bills beside. Miss Dunn did not believe in making dependents and paupers of them. She insisted that people should work when they could, and be paid for it, and unless Jonas rendered her some service she had nothing to give him, though he hung round despairingly, and rubbed his knee with no end of devotion and apparent distraction of pain.

As the cold weather came on, it was told sadly from one parishioner to another that Mr. Stroud's health was failing, and he really did look feeble and old. The people with whom he made his home gave dismal accounts of his sufferings from bad attacks of pain, and every Sunday, when he took his seat in church, pitying eyes followed him. The stories of his generosities still went on. He met the Phipps child going home from school, one November day, and took her into his wagon and drove her to the Walton store, where he bought her a hood and mittens, and some cloth for a dress, and a big shawl, which never could be folded small enough for her, or so that the corner of it would not trail on the ground and gather little sticks. He gave the minister an encyclopædia and a new winter overcoat, and the

Sunday-school library was promised, and was to be Mr. Stroud's Christmas present to the Sunday-school. The old deacons, who had been for many years chief authorities in parish matters, — without whose slow consent nothing had heretofore been done, — found themselves ignored and completely set aside. Everything was to be done as Mr. Stroud and the minister saw fit. The deacons, no doubt, felt a certain sorrow at their degradation, but they could only swim with the stream, and express their thankfulness for the zeal of the brother who had come among them.

Everybody drifted with this current but Miss Dunn, and at last her antagonistic feeling became a cause of great sorrow to her. She searched her heart for the sin of envy and malice, but with all her prayer and penance she could cultivate no better charity toward her neighbor. It was curious that, in spite of wind and rain, the crooked little twig still clung to her kitchen window-sill, and looked in at her every morning as she opened the shutter. It seemed as if it held a dwarfed and wretched soul within its ragged bark; and our friend connected it in her thoughts, she could not tell why, with the stranger and his coming. She felt that she ought to be charitable, and that it was wicked to hate without cause; but Mr. Stroud was still outside the pale of her affec-

tions, and the lilac twig that looked like a man still clung outside the window, in the cold. She could not throw it away, but she wished every morning that it might have blown away in the night, and so have freed her from its haunting unpleasantness. She had not believed before that she was superstitious, and altogether this was a troubled time in her life; but the days grew shorter and shorter, the stones for the foundation of the vestry went crawling up the long hill, load after load, and she filled her cellar fuller of provisions than ever, and set her face resolutely toward getting through another long, hard Walton winter.

It was curious that Mr. Stroud seemed eager to be friendly with Miss Dunn. He treated her with great respect and deference, and appeared to take no notice of her abrupt and slighting manner toward him, though many of the lookers-on accused her of disgraceful rudeness. She said to herself many times that she would treat him civilly; but she did not always succeed, and she became conscious that the new parishioner was anxious to gain her good will, in spite of it. His manner toward her was called long-suffering and really Christian by his admirers; and, if the truth must be told, Miss Dunn became unpopular with her neighbors, and felt herself to be

alone on the losing side, a most unhappy minority of one. She would not have believed that some of the people who had always been her friends could have thrown off the old ties so easily; and it hurt her pride not a little, for she had always been a person of great consequence and influence, and had been faithful and dutiful to the very utmost. She was often slighted and set aside, in these autumn days, and her opinions were seldom sought or listened to. She would have been more than human if she had not remembered how well she had served her towns-folk in their hours of need, and had carried a kind heart and ready hand to help in their days of pleasuring, year after year. She felt very sorry when the thought came to her that her friends were suspecting her of jealousy.

Mr. Stroud had been very friendly and talkative when he had called upon Miss Dunn, soon after he came to Walton, and she had received him with more show of interest than she was able to muster afterward. He did not repeat the visit until one afternoon in the middle of December, when, with much surprise, she saw him drive up to the fence, and after fastening his horse, cover him up carefully, as if he meant to make a long call. Luckily the sitting-room was well warmed already from the kitchen, and Miss Lydia had time to touch a match to the pine-

cone kindlings of the fire that was laid in the Franklin stove; and by the time she had somewhat stiffly ushered in her guest, he could have thought the fire was already half an hour old.

They talked about the weather, and how the snow kept off, and about an old person in the neighborhood who was near death, and with whom Miss Dunn had been watching; and at last there fell an awkward silence, and the longer it continued the harder it became to say anything.

"I have been much pained at discovering that my father was much in fault toward your family," said Mr. Stroud at last, with a good deal of effort. "I wish I had known it sooner; but you will easily understand that, leaving home early in life as I did, and forming new associations, I knew nothing of it. I am anxious now to make restitution. I should have done so years ago if I had known. I cannot say how deeply I regret the disgrace" — and the visitor looked pained and troubled; and as he seemed to feel so keenly the shadow that rested on his name, Miss Dunn's kind heart came to his rescue.

"I should let bygones be bygones, if I was you," she said. "And your mother, you know, was a most excellent woman; as good a neighbor as there was in Walton. Yes, your father got my grandfather to

sign for him, and made promises to him that he knew was lies. It was very hard on the poor old gentleman, but I don't put it down against you, and I don't want you to think there 's any account between us. I 've got enough to carry me through unless something extra should happen. You 've been doing for the good of the parish, and so we 'll say no more about it."

But Mr. Stroud met this generous speech — generous in other ways than in its refusal of the payment of a debt — in a cold-hearted way.

"You are very kind," he said, "but I shall insist upon paying you the amount of the principal, — the original sum that your grandfather lost. I should be glad to include the interest also, but I fear I am not able at this time, without impairing some good work that I have hoped to do" — he was about to add "in other directions," but checked himself in time. "I will make restitution to you so far as I can," and the visitor leaned his head on his hand, and gave a heavy sigh. It was very still in the little sitting-room; the fire had passed the ardor of its youth, and the pine-cones and crow-sticks having snapped and crackled away up the chimney, the sound walnut and maple sticks were now burning lazily but steadily. The picture of old Parson Dunn looked down sol-

emnly from the wall, and for a minute his granddaughter felt inadequate to the occasion.

"If it is to satisfy your own feelings and conscience," she said at last, "I shall put no bar in your way; but I see no use in it and no need of it. I will tell people that you offered to do it, and that I refused to take it, and" —

"I care nothing for the praise of men." The guest flushed, and was somewhat nettled at this, and Miss Lydia felt that she had spoken unkindly in her frankness. She did not know how to soften her speech, and said nothing; wishing more and more that Mr. Stroud would end this quixotic business call, and go away.

She took a good look at him, and was shocked to see how much he was changed and how ill he looked. Her long experience in taking care of sick people had made her eyes quick to see the signs of disease, and she felt a thrill of pity for him and shame for her own uncharitableness, and spoke again, more kindly than before: —

"I want you should let bygones be bygones, Mr. Stroud."

"You are most considerate," he answered; "but I came prepared to give you my note for the six thousand dollars, with six per cent. interest from date.

If I am living, I will pay it within a year; if not, you will look to my executors;" and with a most impressive and solemn manner he drew a folded paper from his pocket. Miss Dunn looked at him and looked at the paper; she did not know whether to laugh or cry.

She urged him to stay to tea, when, after a few minutes, he rose from his chair and made ready to go. He looked about the room, and appeared to be struck by its old-fashioned comfort and warm, plain snugness. "You have a most enviable home," he said, in a way that instantly suggested his being only a boarder in Walton, and a sick man at that. Miss Dunn stood by the kitchen window, and watched him climb, with a good deal of effort, into his carriage, and afterward watched the wagon far down the hill and out of sight. Then she sat down, and looked at the note which she been holding fast in her hand. "Lord forgive me for my wickedness," she said, "but I can't like that man, and I never want to touch his money." She went into the front room, and laid the bit of paper on the table, and sat down again and looked at it. "He lied when he said he did n't know about it," she told herself indignantly. "He was a boy of sixteen or seventeen when it happened, and nobody talked of anything else." But she

thought for the hundredth time that if he were a cheat, somebody ought to have distrusted him beside herself; and after all, what had he done but good since he came to Walton?

For the next day or two it must be confessed that Miss Dunn's heart was greatly softened toward the new parishioner. She thought of him a great deal, as she went about her work, and she kept herself awake nearly the whole of one night, — a thing which seldom happened in connection with her own affairs, though she had lost many a night's rest in the interest of other people. She said to herself over over and again that she had no right to sit in judgment, and that she was simply finding fault with the man for being himself and doing things in his own way. "I might as well blame the cat because she is n't a dog," she told herself. "I ought to wait, any way, until Henry Stroud does one piece of mischief here in Walton." And little by little, in spite of her instinct, which continued its quiet warning, she persuaded herself first into toleration, and then into pity and interest. For would not she be very well off as to money, since this late repayment of a debt had changed her carefully managed provision into a comfortable property, and was not Henry Stroud the cause of the difference? She had been richer than

many of her neighbors, but she had often been anxious lest the end of the year might find her in debt; and the off-years of the apple orchard, and the drought that lessened her hay-crop, forced her to self-denials and economies most trying to her generous nature. Then the thought of the man's illness and failing health would haunt her, and she wished she had a chance to suggest some simple remedies that would be likely to make him more comfortable. His loneliness appealed to her sympathy, for she knew the hardships of it only too well, though the fact remained that nothing had ever tempted her to invite another solitary woman to share her home.

On the second day, while the note still lay untouched on the sitting-room table, and when she felt more shaken and tired than was usual with her, even at her busiest seasons, she stood late in the morning at the kitchen door. The day was uncommonly mild for the season, and the house had seemed a little lonely. For a wonder, none of the neighbors had been in; not even Jonas Phipps had strayed along; and she had not spoken to any one all the day before; indeed, since she had parted from Mr. Stroud himself. She leaned against the door, and looked up and down the road. She would really have liked to see somebody coming, with whom she could exchange

greetings; but nobody was in sight, up the hill or down, and she gave a little sigh, and then bestowed her attention upon the bits of leaves and little sticks that the wind of the night before had swept off the grass to the flagstones, and had piled against the door-step. She thought it looked untidy, and briskly went in again to get her broom with which to set the disorders to rights. It was time to take something out of the oven, and this made a little delay; and when she returned to the outer world she saw a wagon approaching, and saw also that its driver was Mr. Stroud.

Her first impulse was to dart back into the kitchen, but it was quite too late for that, and she returned the salutation with considerable friendliness. Mr. Stroud half checked his horse, and there was a moment of awkwardness, which Miss Dunn ended by speaking in flattering terms of the weather.

"Won't you get out and come in?" she asked, being possessed by a sense of great obligation; and added, "I've just taken a pan of gingerbread out of the oven; perhaps you would relish a piece. It's what my grandmother used to call betwixt hay and grass, as to dinner and breakfast."

Mr. Stroud seemed pleased by this unwonted show of hospitality, and turned his horse toward the hitch-

ing-post at once, while his hostess' heart misgave her at the thought of her fireless sitting-room, and the litter of pans and dishes that possessed the kitchen table. But her guest appeared unconscious of any lack of dignity in his reception, and took the rocking-chair by the front window, and proceeded to eat two large pieces of the hot gingerbread, which must have seriously impaired his appetite for dinner. He looked entirely out of place in the kitchen, however, and made Miss Dunn somewhat uncomfortable; it would have suited her much better if she could have asked him into the sitting-room, but, contrary to her usual custom, she had kept the door shut all the morning.

They talked about nothing that was very interesting, with a good deal of earnestness. Miss Dunn had a little feeling of embarrassment, which was doubled when Mr. Stroud, after having declined further supplies of gingerbread, said in a pointed way, "I have enjoyed thinking of my visit here the day before yesterday."

"I 'm sure I was pleased to see you," untruthfully responded Miss Lydia.

"I think you have a very pleasant home; it is a thing for which we cannot be too grateful to a kind Providence," and he sighed heavily.

Miss Dunn had been afraid that he would make some allusion to the note for six thousand dollars, and showed her gratitude at being spared that by saying, "How is your health, Mr. Stroud? Seems to me you have picked up a little."

But Mr. Stroud sighed again, and shook his head sadly. "I don't seem to have gained," he said.

"I know of some excellent teas for your complaints," she suggested. "Folks laugh nowadays at some o' the old-fashioned remedies, but I must say I like 'em as well as any. I don't think they 've had their day yet."

"I should be very grateful for help," said the guest, "and I wish I could thank you for your sympathy;" and he gave her a look that said so much that it set Miss Lydia's heart into a great flutter; but the next minute she flushed, and was angry with herself for being such a fool, and the old feeling of dislike and distrust crept over her, surely and suddenly.

If Jonas Phipps had been the angel Gabriel, she could not have been more grateful to him for his friendship and assistance in paying her a morning visit at that particular moment, and she offered him the plate of gingerbread with a feeling of real affection.

Jonas selected the largest piece, and disappeared

through the woodshed door, by which he had entered; and Mr. Stroud also took his departure, after making some further expressions of his gratitude. Miss Dunn's brain was in a whirl, but she sought Jonas, and offered him rebuke after rebuke, until he left some long-neglected wood-splitting in self-defense, and went limping away with a piece of board and two stakes and the axe, to mend a broken place in the far corner of the orchard fence; and there he dwelt in unmolested safety until dinner-time.

That afternoon Miss Dunn went out on an errand of mercy to an invalid neighbor, who lived a mile or two away, and did not allow herself to think about her own affairs in peace until she sat down alone, after supper. Then there was nothing else to be done, and she began to feel very much upset. There was an unmistakable meaning and intention quite separate from any words that Mr. Stroud had said to her that morning, and she was both angry and pleased together. She could not fight down the certainty that she was no longer young, and that she was quite alone in the world; that it would be a blessed thing to have some one near her who loved her dearly and would take care of her. It would make life a great deal more interesting if she were doing her round of every-day work for somebody

else's sake, as well as her own. It would be a great victory won from certain members of the parish, also single women, if she became the wife of Mr. Stroud; and she was not without ambition. But, on the other hand, though he was the greatest man in Walton, he was still a Stroud; and she smiled grimly as she thought that some of her own ancestors would be disturbed in their graves at the thought of her marrying one of that family. And it was a doubtful question whether she was wise in undertaking the care of a sick man; for, in spite of her skill in nursing, he might not be going to spend much more time in this world. At last she rose impatiently, and marched off to bed, and said to herself the last thing before she went to sleep, "I guess I 'd better wait until I 've heard more about it, before I begin to worry myself; but he need n't think I 'm going to run after him the way some folks have."

She was almost ashamed when she found herself thinking about the new parishioner the first thing in the morning, and called herself an old fool; but there was, after all, satisfaction in the thought of his admiration of her gingerbread, and she recalled some ignominious failure that Mrs. West, his present hostess, had made in the cake line at a parish supper, not long before, and she wondered if the poor man were

often treated to such cooking as that. She went into the front room and took up the bit of paper which he had given her, and smoothed it out, and looked at the clerkish, regular writing with interest. "I dare say he would have to go to New York and round on business," she told herself, and then thought with awe and satisfaction of his wealth. "I always did think I should like traveling," she said; and then was so angry with herself, that if Jonas had appeared at that moment it would have fared cruelly hard with him.

But a little later in the day the tide of her feeling turned, for Jonas came bravely in to offer his congratulations for her good fortune. Miss Dunn had not spoken of Mr. Stroud's repayment of the old debt to any one. She had known that it would be right and just, and had been girding up her strength to the fray. Somebody else had been before her, and it must have been none other than her benefactor himself. It will easily be imagined how the story of this great piece of generosity flew from house to house, and Jonas said that everybody knew of it all over town, in answer to Miss Lydia's startled inquiry. This spoiled everything, and the new growth of interest was crushed, and the world was seen to be the same world as before, only more in shadow

than ever, while our friend hardly knew why she was so provoked and disappointed. She said to herself that it was no use to go against your nature, and she knew what sort of a man he was the first time she set eyes on him; if other folks did n't, the worst was their own. But she went about the house drearily, and Jonas, who was promptly dismissed, though he was sure she wished him to fill a certain water hogshead from the orchard spring, reported at the next neighbor's that Miss Lyddy was taking her prosperity dreadful hard. For his part, he wondered whether she was kind of mortified, or whether she was scared to stay alone with so much money in the house.

It was a great relief on the next day, which was Sunday, that there was so deep a fall of snow that even so constant and devoted a church-goer as our heroine was obliged to stay at home. Though she was glad of this excuse from facing her accusing neighbors, they felt it to be a loss of entertainment; and perhaps it was for the satisfaction of these deferred hopes of seeing her come into church that the Wednesday evening meeting was uncommonly well attended. It was a clear, bright night, and the Sunday's snow was trodden into capital sleighing, and as good walking as can ever be in country roads. It was a long while since the moon had had to light so

many Walton people to the Wednesday meeting, and it was for anything but to say their prayers together.

The new parishioner sat in his accustomed seat near the pulpit, and Miss Dunn sat in her old family pew, which was on the side and faced the congregation. She would not have sat anywhere else for untold gold, and she made so much effort to look unconcerned that her cheeks were red with excitement, and her hands shook when she held the hymn-book. Mr. Peckham spoke with great feeling of his pleasure at meeting so large a congregation, and Mr. Stroud prayed, and two women made an ostentatious use of their pocket-handkerchiefs for several minutes afterward. The old deacons followed in their turn, the hymns were sung, and the meeting was possessed of a good deal more fervor than usual. Mr. Peckham had read a few verses from the book of the Revelation, and was explaining them earnestly. Miss Dunn had felt as if this meeting were to be in some way personal and condemnatory of herself; but as the hour went on she quite recovered her self-possession, and the horrors of her position as regarded Walton society became much less.

At the last of the evening, while Mr. Stroud himself was speaking, she heard the door of the church open, and looking around she saw two men come

quickly in and seat themselves in the pew nearest the door. From her own pew at the side of the church she could look up and down the aisle, and she saw these strangers give a little nod at each other, and look amused as they listened to the speaker. She loitered in her pew for a few minutes after the meeting was over, as was her habit, and spoke to one and another of her friends as usual. She had a great anxiety not to do anything uncommon, and when she was half-way down the aisle she felt herself to have regained her equilibrium. Old Mrs. Bangs, who was waiting by the stove for the deacon to get his horse ready, and bring him round from the rail to the church door, caught at her sleeve as she went by, and after speaking about the meeting and some general matters added bluntly, "Well Lyddy, you can't say anything against Mr. Stroud, now. I 'm sure he has done handsome by you."

"I 've never meant to say anything against him," answered Miss Dunn; "but I think he was foolish to do what he has. I tried to persuade him out of it, I 'm sure." And just at this moment Mr. Stroud and the minister came by, when Miss Dunn, who had for a few moments forgotten the two strangers, noticed with surprise that they were still in the pew next the door.

One of them stepped forward and spoke to Mr. Stroud, who looked disturbed and shocked. He leaned back against the wall, and acted as if he were much in despair. The two men watched him, and seemed to be waiting, and it was only a minute before he turned to Mr. Peckham, and said, — Miss Dunn being so near that she heard every word, — "I find I must take a long, cold journey to-night. My presence is needed in New York, and I must go at once to catch the train at Walpole."

Mr. Peckham expressed his sorrow for this, his friend being so feeble and sensitive to cold. He said a good deal in trying to urge him to wait until morning; but after one look at the grim messengers, Mr. Stroud politely waived the arguments, and buttoned up his overcoat and went out into the moonlight night. One of the strangers got into the sleigh with him, and the other followed alone; and that was the last that was seen of the New Parishioner, and the last of his illustrious reign in Walton.

"My conscience!" said Jonas Phipps, one day early in the spring, when he made his first appearance at Miss Dunn's after a long illness. "How come you to see through that cheat, when all the rest of us was so taken in? I don't know 's Mr. Peck-

ham is ever going to git over it. We all took him to be spending money by the fistful, and most of it was nothing but givin' his note and saying 'Charge it to me,' as if he was the great Lord Gull. Nobody had any kind of doubt but what his pockets was lined with money. Not but what it wa'n't a kind of dreadful thing that he should ha' died all alone in his bed over there to Walpole. I s'pose 't was that long ride in the cold and his being upset by the officers pouncing on to him so, — right in the meeting-house. He did spend some honest money though: I can think o' four or five hundred dollars he left in one place and another whilst he was here."

Miss Dunn said nothing, and after reflecting a while Jonas went on: —

"He was gifted in prayer more than most, now, was n't he? I think, being a sick man, and knowing it, after he defaulted down South there, he thought he would be as religious as he could while he had time. He must have felt as safe here as anywhere. They pronounced his name different down South, you know. Strude they called it; and somebody was telling me folks thought it was likely he 'd been going under another name, any way. Land! there 's all that foundation stone for the vestry laying up there on the meetin' house yard. I wonder when

they 're going to raise. And the parish 's got to pay for that new library he gave it for a Christmas present. Run an awful rig, did n't he? I was surprised when they told me his wife had left him, 'stead of her being dead, as we thought all along. I 've sometimes thought he was a little sprung. 'How he did strut about, and all the women made everything of him but you," said Jonas, trying to turn a pretty compliment to Miss Dunn's discretion. "I wonder who paid the bills for his funeral? Nobody seemed to know at the time."

"It was just as well if they did n't," said Lydia Dunn, looking a little conscious. "Now, Jonas Phipps, we 've both got work to do, and lives to live, and that poor creature 's gone to his last account; we have n't any business with him, as I know of. He could n't help being a Stroud, and the sins he could help he 's had a chance to be ashamed of before this. For my part, I don't want to hear another thing about him. But I do thank my stars I never made a fool of myself, and I wish others, for their sakes, could say as much. I guess I had trouble o' mind enough to last me one while. I don't know as some folks knows what honesty is: you might as well blame a black and white cat for not being a good mouser."

"How 's that little gray cat turned out, you started to raise along in the winter?" interrupted Jonas, earnestly; and Miss Dunn replied, not without a smile, that she seemed to be a likely kitten.

"Any way, folks thinks a sight of your opinion," said Jonas again. "And mother, she sticks to it you did me a sight more good than the doctor. She says I never should ha' pulled through if it had n't been for the time you spent a-watching of me, and them things you recommended. I guess everybody has to allow that in the long run you 've done more good than Stroud," and grateful Mr. Phipps rubbed his eyes with his coat sleeve. "I told the minister so last time he come to see me. 'Rising sixty year,' says I, 'she 's been doing of good works!'" But at this Miss Lydia looked displeased. "He 's dreadful ashamed, now, about having took up with Stroud so. 'Talk 's cheap,' says I to Mr. Peckham, 'and Stroud was great on talk.'"

"Now, Jonas Phipps," said Miss Lydia, "there was nobody who kept round Henry Stroud any closer than you did. You always were telling me how rich he was, and how much he gave away, and everything he 'd been doing, and what an addition he was to the place."

"It did look like it for a time," said Jonas, humbly.

"Even you would ha' liked him if you could, but your good judgment would n't allow. Seems dreadful dull since I got about again, not hearing anything about his goin's-on. Asa Singer was telling of me, as I come up the hill, — he called me in to get me to try a bar'l of cider they 'd just tapped for spring use, he said there wa'n't an apple in it but what was sound, and it did go to the right spot, I tell ye, — Asa was telling of me that a bill come from somewheres South only yesterday. I wonder what he 'd 'a' done if he had n't died; they all say he had n't much money by him."

Miss Dunn felt a sense of nearness to the edge of a precipice. She often remembered, in these days, that she had taken at least one step in a most dangerous direction. She had called herself names all winter long, and felt like a hypocrite when people complimented her on her superior discretion. It is a most humiliating thing to lose one's self-respect, and she never could forget that for a few hours she had been in peril of defeat, and of being bought over, like the rest. She had allowed herself to glance at the temptation, and she could make no excuse for herself. The Lord had made her a woman, to be sure, but she need not have been a silly one.

Jonas went on with his reflections: "I can't be-

lieve but what he 'd done better if he 'd had a longer chance. He was a great hand for a meeting, and he seemed to want to do well by everybody; but they say he 'd had to clear out from three or four places running, and some thinks he may have got the money he spent here by gambling."

"It 's no kind of use to make a man out worse than he is," said Miss Dunn, angrily, "and for my part I am sick to death of hearing about Henry Stroud. I hoped it had blown over a little, but I suppose it 's natural you should want to take your turn at it. First, folks was all pecking at me because I would n't bow down and worship him, and now they want me to throw rocks at his tomb-stone. They go just like a pack of sheep over a stone wall; one gets her nose over, and all the rest think they 've got to die if they don't follow. He 's gone to his last account, and we 'd better let him alone."

It was easy enough to say this, but the subject continued to be an interesting one, and provoked frequent discussions for many months afterward, in that neighborhood. It was some time before the residents of surrounding towns could resist asking such Walton people as ventured to stray away from home what had become of the great man they used to have over there, or if they had moved into the new vestry yet.

As for the twig at the window, the outer blind got loose one windy winter night, and struck against it and set it free, and it was blown along the frozen snow far down the hill and out of sight; and in the morning Miss Dunn felt lighter-hearted, because she missed it from its place. It seemed to her that she was growing old and notional. She had felt as young as ever until that winter, for her girlhood had been a dutiful and quiet one. It was fortunate that she found so much to do inside her house and out, and everybody said that her front yard was the handsomest in Walton that summer; the flowers bloomed in great splendor, and her two best china vases from the parlor mantel-piece were filled for the adornment of the pulpit Sunday after Sunday. Even Jonas Phipps did not suspect, as he toiled in her company, that sad thoughts often assailed her, and could not be driven away either by a double diligence in her solitary housekeeping, or by her painstaking care that the garden pinks and lilies should be untroubled by weeds.

AN ONLY SON.

It was growing more and more uncomfortable in the room where Deacon Price had spent the greater part of a hot July morning. The sun did not shine in, for it was now directly overhead, but the glare of its reflection from the dusty village street and the white house opposite was blinding to the eyes. At least one of the three selectmen of Dalton, who were assembled in solemn conclave, looked up several times at the tops of the windows, and thought they had better see about getting some curtains.

There was more business than usual, but most of it belonged to the familiar detail of the office; there were bills to pay for the support of the town's-poor and the district schools, and afterward some discussion arose about a new piece of road which had been projected by a few citizens, who were as violently opposed by others. The selectmen were agreed upon this question, but they proposed to speak in private with the county commissioners, who were expected to

view the region of the new highway the next week. This, however, had been well canvassed at their last meeting, and they had reached no new conclusions since; so presently the conversation flagged a little, and Deacon Price drummed upon the ink-spattered table with his long, brown fingers, and John Kendall the grist-miller rose impatiently and went to the small window, where he stood with blinking eyes looking down into the street. His well-rounded figure made a pleasant shadow in that part of the room, but it seemed to grow hotter every moment. Captain Abel Stone left his chair impatiently, and taking his hat went down the short flight of stairs that led to the street, knocking his thick shuffling boots clumsily by the way. He reached the sidewalk, and looked up and down the street, but nobody was coming; so he turned to Asa Ball the shoemaker, who was standing in his shop-door.

"Business is n't brisk, I take it?" inquired the captain; and Mr. Ball replied that he did n't do much more than tend shop, nowadays. Folks would keep on buying cheap shoes, and thinking they saved more money on two pair a year for five dollars than when he used to make 'em one pair for four. "But I make better pay than I used to working at my trade, and so I ain't going to fret," said Asa shrewdly, with a

significant glance at a modest pile of empty cloth-boot boxes; and the captain laughed a little, and took a nibble at a piece of tobacco which he had found with much difficulty in one of his deep coat pockets. He had followed the sea in his early life, but had returned to the small, stony farm which had been the home of his childhood, perhaps fifteen years before this story begins. He had taken as kindly to inland life as if he had never been even spattered with sea water, and had been instantly given the position in town affairs which his wealth and character merited. He still retained a good deal of his nautical way of looking at things. One would say that to judge by his appearance he had been well rubbed with tar and salt, and it was supposed by his neighbors that his old sea-chests were guardians of much money; he was overrated by some of them as being worth fifteen thousand dollars with the farm thrown in. He was considered very peculiar, because he liked to live in the somewhat dilapidated little farmhouse, and some of his attempts at cultivating the sterile soil were the occasion of much amusement. He had made a large scrap-book, during his long sea-voyages, of all sorts of hints and suggestions for the tillage of the ground, gleaned from books and newspapers and almanacs, and nobody knows where else. He had pasted these

in, or copied them in his stiff, careful handwriting, and had pleased himself by watching his collection grow while he was looking forward through the long, storm-tossed years to his quiet anchorage among the Dalton hills. He was a single man, and though a braver never had trod the quarter-deck, from motives of wisest policy he seldom opposed his will to that of Widow Martha Hawkes, who had consented to do him the great favor of keeping his house.

"Havin' a long session to-day, seems to me," observed the shoemaker, with little appearance of the curiosity which he really felt.

"There was a good many p'ints to be looked over," answered Captain Stone, becoming aware that he had secrets to guard, and looking impenetrable and unconcerned. "It 's worked into a long drought, just as I said — I never took note of a drier sky; don't seem now as if we ever should get a sprinkle out of it, but I suppose we shall;" and he turned with a sigh to the door, and disappeared again up the narrow stairway. The three horses which were tied to adjacent posts in the full blaze of the sun all hung their ancient heads wearily, and solaced their disappointment as best they might. They had felt certain, when the captain appeared, that the selectmen's meeting was over. If they had been better acquainted

with politics they might have wished that there could be a rising of the opposition, so that their masters would go out of office for as many years as they had come in.

The captain's companions looked up at him eagerly, as if they were sure that he was the herald of the expected tax-collector, who was to pay a large sum of money to them, of which the town treasury was in need. It was close upon twelve o'clock, and only a very great emergency would detain them beyond that time. They were growing very hungry, and when the captain, after a grave shake of his head, had settled into his chair again, they all felt more or less revengeful, though Deacon Price showed it by looking sad. One would have thought that he was waiting with reluctance to see some punishment descend upon the head of the delaying official.

"Well, Mis' Hawkes will be waiting for me, and she never likes that," said Captain Stone at last; and just at that minute was heard the sound of wheels.

"Perhaps it 's my mare stepping about, — she 's dreadful restive in fly-time," suggested Mr. Kendall, and at once put his head out of the window; but when he took it in again, it was to tell his fellow-officers that Jackson was coming, and then they all sat solemnly in their chairs, with as much dignity as the

situation of things allowed. Their judicial and governmental authority was plainly depicted in their expression. On ordinary occasions they were not remarkable, except as excellent old-fashioned country men; but when they represented to the world the personality and character of the town of Dalton, they would not have looked out of place seated in that stately company which Carpaccio has painted in the Reception of the English Ambassadors. It was Dalton that was to give audience that summer day, in the dusty, bare room, as Venice listens soberly in the picture.

They heard a man speak to his horse and leap to the ground heavily, and then listened eagerly to the clicks and fumbling which represented the tying of the halter, and then there were sounds of steps upon the stairway. The voice of Mr. Ball was heard, but it did not seem to have attracted much attention, and presently the long-waited-for messenger was in the room. He was dusty and sun-burnt, and looked good-naturedly at his hosts. They greeted him amiably enough, and after he had put his worn red handkerchief away he took a leather wallet from his pocket, and looking at a little roll of bills almost reluctantly, turned them over with lingering fingers and passed them to Mr. Kendall, who sat nearest him, saying that he believed it was just right.

There was little else said, and after the money had again been counted the meeting was over. There had indeed been a hurried arrangement as to who should guard the treasury, but when Deacon Price had acknowledged that he meant to go to South Dalton next morning, he was at once deputed to carry the remittance to the bank there, where the town's funds and many of its papers already reposed. The deacon said slowly that he did n't know as he cared about keeping so much money in the house, but he was not relieved by either of his colleagues, and so these honest men separated and returned to private life again. Their homes were at some distance from each other; but for a half mile or so Deacon Price followed Captain Stone, and a cloud of dust followed them both. Then the captain turned to the left, up toward the hills; but Deacon Price kept on for some distance through the level lands, and at last went down a long lane, unshaded except here and there where some ambitious fence stakes had succeeded in changing themselves into slender willow-trees. In the spring the sides of the lane had been wet, and were full of green things, growing as fast as they could; but now these had been for some time dried up. The lane was bordered with dusty mayweed, and three deep furrows were worn through the turf, where the

wagon wheels and the horse's patient feet had traveled back and forward so many years. The house stood at the end, looking toward the main road as if it wished it were there; it was a low-storied white house, with faded green blinds.

The deacon had tried to hurry his slow horse still more after he caught sight of another horse and wagon standing in the wide dooryard. He had entirely forgotten until that moment that his niece and housekeeper, Eliza Storrow, had made a final announcement in the morning that she was going to start early that afternoon for the next town to help celebrate a golden wedding. Poor Eliza had been somewhat irate because even this uncommon season of high festival failed to excite her uncle's love for society. She had made him run the gauntlet, as usual on such occasions, by telling him successively that he took no interest in nobody and nothing, and that she was sure she should n't know what to say when people asked where he was; that it looked real unfeeling and cold-hearted, and he could n't expect folks to show any interest in him. These arguments, with many others, had been brought forward on previous occasions until the deacon knew them all by heart, and he had listened to them impassively that morning, only observing cautiously to his son that

Eliza must go through with just so much. But he had promised to come back early from the village, since Eliza and the cousin who was to call for her meant to start soon after twelve. It was a long drive, and they wished to be in good season for the gathering of the clans.

He left the horse standing in the yard and went into the house, feeling carefully at his inner coat pocket as he did so. Eliza had been watching for him, but the minute he came in sight she had left the window and begun to scurry about in the pantry. The deacon did not stop to speak to her, but went directly to his bedroom, and after a moment's thought placed the precious wallet deep under the pillows. This act was followed by another moment's reflection, and as the old man turned, his son stood before him in the doorway. Neither spoke; there was a feeling of embarrassment which was not uncommon between them; but presently the young man said, "Eliza 's been waiting for you to have your dinner; she 's in a great hurry to get off. I 'll be in just as quick as I take care of the horse."

"You let her be; I 'll put her up myself," said the deacon, a little ungraciously. "I guess Eliza 'll be there soon enough. I should n't think she 'd want to start to ride way over there right in the middle of

the day." At another time he would have been pleased with Warren's offer of aid, for that young man's bent was not in what we are pleased to call a practical direction. As he left the kitchen he noticed for the first time Mrs. Starbird, who sat by the farther window dressed in her best, and evidently brimming over with reproachful impatience. Deacon Price was a hospitable man, and stopped to shake hands with her kindly, and to explain that he had been delayed by some business that had come before the selectmen. He was politely assured that the delay was not of the least consequence, for Mrs. Starbird was going to drive the colt, and could make up the lost time on the road. As they stood talking, Eliza's footsteps were heard behind them, and without turning or deigning to enter into any conversation with his niece the deacon went out into the bright sunlight again.

Warren had preceded him after all, and was unfastening one of the traces, and his father unbuckled the other without a word. "You go in and have your dinner, — why won't you, father?" the young man said, looking up appealingly. "You need n't be afraid but I 'll do this all right."

"I declare, I was grieved when I saw, as I come up the lane, that you had n't mended up the fence

there where I told you this forenoon. I had to be off, and there 's the two calves right into the garden piece, and I don't know what works they 've been and done. It does seem too bad, Warren."

The son had worn a pleased and almost triumphant look, as if he had good news to tell, but now his face fell, and he turned crimson with shame and anger. "I would n't have forgot that for anything!" he stammered. "I 've been hurrying as fast as I could with something I 've been doing — I 'm going off" — but his father had already stepped inside the barn door with the hungry horse, and it was no use to say any more. Presently the deacon went into the house and ate his dinner, and after the few dishes had been washed, and Eliza had told him about the bread and a piece of cold boiled beef and a row of blueberry pies and the sheet of gingerbread which she had provided for the family's sustenance in her absence, she added that she might not be back until early Wednesday morning, and then she drove away in triumph with cousin Starbird. It was the first outing the good woman had had for more than a year, except for half a day or so, and the deacon wished her good-day with real affection and sympathy, having already asked if she had everything she wanted to carry over, and finally he desired his respects to be given to the

folks. He stood at the corner of the house and watched her all the way down the lane until she turned into the main road, and Eliza herself was much pleased as she caught sight of him. She waved her hand gallantly, to which he responded by an almost imperceptible inclination of the head and at once turned away. "There ain't a better man alive," said cousin Starbird, whipping the elderly colt; "he 's as set as anybody I ever see, in his own ways, but he 's real good hearted. I don't know anybody I 'd look to quicker than him if I got into misfortune. He 's aged a good deal this last year, don't you think he has, 'Liza? Sometimes I feel sure that Warren's odd notions wears on him more than we think."

"Course they do," said Eliza, throwing back the shawl which she had felt obliged to put on at first, out of respect to the occasion. "His father 's mindful of Warren every hour in the day. He is getting more and more helpless and forgitful, and uncle 's growing feeble, and he ain't able either to hire help or to do the farm work himself. Sometimes Warren takes holt real good, but it ain't often; and there he sets, up in that room he 's fixed over the wood-house, and tinkers all day long. Last winter he used to be there till late at night; he took out one o' the window panes and set a funnel out through, and used to

keep a fire going and a bright light up there till one or two o'clock in the morning. His father never slept a wink, I don't believe. He looks like a man of hard on to eighty, and he wa'n't but sixty-seven his last birthday. I guess Warren 's teased him out of about all the bank money he had long ago. There! I used to get interested myself in Warren's notions about his machines, but now I can't bear to hear him begin, and I go right into the pantry and rattle round as if I was drove to pieces."

"I suppose his father has indulged him more, seeing that he was so much younger than all the rest of his children, and they being dead anyway. I declare, I never see such a beautiful creatur' as Warren's mother was. I always thought she was kind of homesick here; 't was a lonesome place to me, always, and I never counted on its being healthy. The deacon 's begun to look kind o' mossy, and I don't think it 's all worry o' mind. It 's kind of low land and it 's always been called fevery." Cousin Starbird was apt to look on the dark side of things. "You can't always see the marks o' trouble," she went on. "There was old John Stacy, that lost three children in one day with scarlet fever, the fall after his wife died; then his house got afire, and the bank failed where his property was. Job himself could n't be

no worse off; and he took on dreadful, as one thing after another come upon him, but there wa'n't a younger appearing man of his age anywhere at the time he died. He seemed to spring right up again, like a bent withe. I always thought it was a kind of a pity that the deacon did n't push Warren right off while he was young. He kept him to home trying to make a farm-boy of him till he was a grown man."

"Warren used to beseech him dreadfully to let him go off, when I first come over to live," said Eliza Storrow. "He had a great notion of working in some kind of a machine shop, and they said that there wa'n't so smart a workman there as he was; but he got a notion that he could improve on one of the machines, and he lost his interest in workin' his trade, and the end of it was that he spent a sight o' money to get a patent, and found somebody had stepped in with another just the week before. It was an awful mean thing, too, for some thought it was his notion that had been stole from him. There was a fellow that boarded where he did, to Lowell, that left all of a sudden, and they thought he took the plan, — Warren being always free and pleasant with him, — and then let somebody else have part of it to get the patent through; anyway it was n't called for in any name they knew; Warren was

dreadful discouraged about it, and was set against folks knowing, so don't you never say nothing that I said about it. I think he 's kind of crazed about machinery, and I don't believe he knows what he 's about more than half the time. He never give me a misbeholden word, I 'll say that for him, but it 's getting to be a melancholy habitation if ever I see one," said Eliza, mournfully; and after this the conversation turned to more hopeful themes relating to the golden wedding.

The deacon had sighed as he turned away. He had wondered if they would make the twelve-mile journey in safety, and smiled in spite of himself as he remembered an old story. He wished he had reminded them of those two old women who were traveling from Dalton to Somerset, and forgot where they came from, and what their names where, and where they were going. After this hidden spring of humor had bubbled to the surface a little too late for anybody's enjoyment but his own, he relapsed into his usual plaintive gravity, and, bringing a hammer and nails and some stakes from the wood-house, he went out to mend the broken fence. It had been patched and propped before, and now seemed hardly to be repaired. The boards and posts had rotted away, and the gamesome calves had forced a wide

breach in so weak a wall. It was a half afternoon's work, and the day was hot, but the tired old man set about it unflinchingly, and took no rest until he had given the topmost rail a shake and assured himself that it would last through his day. He had brought more tools and pieces of board, and he put these together to be replaced. Just as he had begun his work he had caught sight of his son walking quickly away, far beyond the house, across the pastures. The deacon had given a heavy sigh, and as he had hammered and sawed and built his fence again, there had been more than one sigh to follow it, for had not this only son grown more helpless and useless than ever? There seemed little to look forward to in life.

The garden was being sadly treated and hindered by the drought; the beets and onions were only half grown, and the reliable old herb-bed seemed to have given up the fight altogether. In one place there had once been a flower-bed which belonged to Warren's mother, but it was almost wholly covered with grass. Eliza had no fondness for flowers, and the two men usually were unconscious that there were such things in the world. But this afternoon the deacon was glad to see a solitary sprig of London Pride, which stood out in bold relief against the gray

post by the little garden gate. It sent a bright ray of encouragement into the shadow of his thoughts, and he went on his way cheerfully. He told himself that now he would attend to the wagon wheels, because he should need to start early in the morning, in order to get home before the heat of the day; it was a hot piece of road from here to the south village. He wondered idly where Warren had gone; he was glad he had not asked for money that day, but he had done questioning his son about his plans, or even the reason of his occasional absences.

The side door, which led into the kitchen, was shaded now, and a slight breeze seemed to be coming across the level fields, so the deacon sat down on the doorstep to rest. The old cat came out as if she wished for company, and rubbed against his arm and mewed without making any noticeable sound. She put her fore-feet on the old man's knee and looked eagerly in his face and mewed again inaudibly, and her master laughed and wondered what she wanted. "I suppose the cellar door is locked and bolted, and you want to go down," said the deacon, "that 's it, ain't it? I should ha' thought 'Liza would have rec'lected about them kittens, should n't you?" and pleasing himself with the creature's companionship, he rose and entered the house. The cat trotted

alongside and disappeared quickly down the stairway, and, moved by some strange impulse, Deacon Price went into his bedroom to make sure that the wallet was safe under the pillow. He did not reach it at first, and he groped again, thinking that he had forgotten he pushed it so far under. But although he eagerly threw off the clothes and the pillows, and shook them twice over, and got down on his hands and knees and crept under the bed, and felt an odd singing noise grow louder and louder in his head, and at last became dizzy and dropped into the nearest chair, there was no wallet to be found.

At last he crept out into the empty kitchen, where the only sound was made by a fly that buzzed dismally in a spider's web. The air was close and hot in the house, and as the old man stood in the doorway it seemed as if there had some change come over his whole familiar world. He felt puzzled and weak, and at first started to go out to the wagon with the vain hope of finding the lost purse; it might be that he — but there was no use in imagining that he had done anything but put it carefully under the pillow, that his son had stood in the doorway as he lifted his head, and that the money was gone. It was no use to deceive himself, or to hunt through the house; he had always before his eyes the picture of the pasture

slope with the well-known figure of his son following across it the path that led to the nearest railroad station, a mile or two away.

The daylight waned slowly, and the heat of the sun lingered late into the night. Poor John Price went through with his usual duties mechanically, but with perfect care, and he made the doing of his work last as long as he could. The pig and the chickens and the horse were fed; then there were the cows to bring in from pasture and to be milked; and at last the poor man even remembered the cat, and gave her a saucer of milk for her supper; but still it would not grow dark, and still the shame and sorrow weighed him down. In his restlessness he went through the lower rooms of the house, and opened the front door and shut it again, and looked into the stiff little best room, and felt as if he were following the country custom so familiar to him, of watching with the dead.

He did not get much sleep either, in the uncomfortable bed which he had tried to put into some sort of order before he lay down. Once he prayed aloud that the Lord would vouchsafe him a miracle, and that he might find his trust again, and what was still more precious, his confidence in his only son. For some reason he could not bear the sound of his own voice; and the thought of his time-honored office in

the church pained him, for was it not disgraced and made a reproach?

Little by little the first sharpness of the shock wore away, and he tried to think what was to be done. The thought seized him that his son might have left some explanation of his going away, and he rose and took a candle and went to the little workshop. There was less than the usual litter of cogwheels and springs and screws, but somehow in the hot little room a feeling of reassurance and almost of hope took possession of him. It might be that Warren's hopes would not be disappointed, that he might be able to repay the stolen sum, that he had only secreted it, and would return later and give it back; for the poor deacon assured himself over and over that he would talk about the boy's affairs with him, and try again to aid him and to put him into a likely way at last, even if he had to mortgage the farm.

But in the morning, if there was still no sign of the lad, what could be done? The money which Jerry Jackson had owed the town as tax-collector, and paid at last that very day, — that seven hundred dollars; the five hundred dollar bill and the two that stood for a hundred each, and some smaller bills which were to pay the interest, — how should they be replaced? He had no ready money of any

amount, nor would have until the pay came for some hay, or unless he could persuade a neighbor, whose payments were honest but slow, to take up a note given for a piece of outlying woodland sold the winter before.

All through that long summer night he worried and waited for the morning, and sometimes told himself that his only son had robbed him, and sometimes said that Warren would never serve him like that, and when he came home it would be all made right. The whippoorwills were singing about the house, and one even came to perch on the kitchen doorstep and make its accusing cry. The waning moon rose late, and made a solemn red light in the east, and shone straight in at the little bedroom window as if it were a distant bale-fire on the hills. A little dog kept up a fierce barking by the next farmhouse, far away across the fields, and at last the tired man was ready to think his miserable wakefulness was the fault of the cur. . . . Yes, he had given Warren all the money he could, he had meant well by the boy, and surely now, unless the poor fellow had gone mad, there would be some way out of all this trouble; at any rate he would not let other people have a chance to call his son a thief until there was no help for it.

The next morning, after a short, uneasy sleep, from which the deacon had a sad awaking, he hungrily ate some breakfast at the pantry shelves, and harnessed the old horse, and set out on a day's journey of which he hardly knew the end. He shut the door of the house, and locked it, and gave a look of lingering affection at the old place, even stopping the horse for a minute in the lane that he might turn to survey it again most carefully. He felt as if he were going to do it wrong, and as if it were a conscious thing, the old weather-beaten dwelling that had sheltered him all his life, and those who had been dearest to him. It had no great attractions for a stranger. It was a representative house for that somewhat primitive farming region, though it had fallen out of repair, and wore a damaged and resourceless aspect. Tho appearance of a man's home is exactly characteristic of himself. Human nature is more powerful than its surroundings, and shapes them inevitably to itself.

It was still very early in the morning, and few persons were stirring. In fact, Deacon Price met nobody on the road except a sleepy boy following his cows to pasture, and he did not feel like looking even him in the face, but gave a pull at the reins to hurry the horse and pass by the quicker. He took a cross road that was cool and shady at that hour, and while

he journeyed slowly up the rough by-way he let the horse choose its own course without guidance. Some birds were crying and calling in the woods close by, as if it were altogether a day of ill omen and disaster. John Price felt more and more as if his world was coming to an end, and everything was going to pieces. He never had understood his son very well; there are some people who are like the moon, always with one side hidden and turned away, and Warren was only half familiar to his father. The old man had been at first inclined to treat his bright boy with a sort of respect and reverence, but in later years this had changed little by little to impatience and suspicion. It had been a great mortification that he had been obliged to maintain him, and once when somebody, perhaps Eliza Storrow, had been commenting upon a certain crop of wild oats which a neighboring lad had arranged for his harvesting, the deacon was heard to mutter, "Better them than no crop at all!" Yet he had never suffered his acquaintances to comment upon his son's behavior; his own treatment of him in public had insisted upon the rendering of respect from other people, but he had not acknowledged to himself, until this last sad night, that there was no practical result to be hoped for from Warren's gifts and graces. This might have been borne, and they

might have struggled on together, somehow or other, but for the terrible blow of the theft of the town's money, which had left a debt and sorrow on the old man's shoulders almost too heavy to be borne.

In a short time the woods were passed and the road led out to a pleasant country of quite a different character from the lowland neighborhood left behind. There were gently sloping hills and long lines of elms, and the farms looked more prosperous. One farm only on this road was unproductive, and it was partly the fault of art, and partly of nature, for this was the homestead of Captain Stone, a better sailor than farmer. Its pastures were gathering-places for the ledges, and its fields had been made swampy by many springs. It seemed to be the waste corner of that region for all unused and undeveloped materials of farming land; but while there was every requisite, there was a chaotic and primitive arrangement or no-arrangement. Yet the captain had settled down here in blissful content as a tiller of the soil; and while he might have bought the best farm in the county, he congratulated himself upon his rare privileges here, and would have found more level and kindly acres as uninteresting as being becalmed in tropic seas. He worked his farm as he had sailed his ships, by using tact and discretion, and with true seaman's philoso-

phy he never fretted. He waited for the wind to change, or the tide of spring to flow, or of winter to ebb, for he had long ago learned there was no hurrying nature; and to hear him talk of one of his small plots of thin hay or slow-growing potatoes, you would have thought it an intelligent creature which existed mainly on his benevolent encouragement and tolerance. By some persons the captain was laughed at, and by others he was condemned. The trouble was that he had a shrewd insight into human nature, and was so impossible to deceive or to persuade against his will that he had made many enemies, who had hoped to grow rich by emptying the good old man's pockets.

It was to this lifelong friend that Deacon Price had turned in his extremity; but as he drew nearer that morning to the red house on the hilltop, his heart began to fail him, for what if he should be refused! There seemed no other resource, in such a case, but to make the sad occurrence known, or to go away in search of Warren himself. He could put the deeds of his farm, those worn deeds that had come down from father to son generation after generation, into the hands of the other selectmen, who would be sure to stand his friends and keep the secret for a time. Warren had looked discouraged, and pale, and desperate in the last month, and his father

suddenly remembered this, and groaned aloud as he wished that the boy had come to him, and that he had made it possible, instead of coldly ignoring and disapproving him day after day; such a mixture of wrath and shame and compassion has seldom been in a father's heart.

The captain was abroad early, and the deacon saw him first, sauntering about at the foot of the slope on which his house and buildings stood. He seemed to be examining the soil, and greeted his guest with a hearty satisfaction. The deacon slowly alighted, and leaving his trusty steed to gnaw the fence or browse among the bushes as she chose, went into the field. He walked feebly, and when he met the captain he could hardly find words to tell his errand. Men of his kind are apt to be made silent by any great occurrence; they have rarely anything but a limited power of expression, and their language only serves them for common use. Those who have lived close to nature understand each other without speech, as dogs or horses do, and the elder generations of New Englanders knew less of society and human companionship and association than we can comprehend.

The captain had watched his visitor as he came toward him, and when they met he gave one quick,

final look, and then proceeded to make use of his usual forms of greeting, as if he had no idea that anything was the matter.

"I 've taken a notion to set out some cramb'ries hereabouts, another year," he announced. "I never made a voyage to sea without cramb'ries aboard, if I could help myself. They last well, and taste sprightly when other things is begun to lose savor. I don't cut any hay to speak of, in this piece. I 've been meaning to tackle it somehow, — see here," — pushing it with his great foot, — "it 's all coming up brakes and sedge. I do' know 's you want to be standing about — it *is* master spongy for good grass land, and 't would be a great expense to drain it off. I s'pose I 'm gettin' too old to try any of these new notions, but they sort of divert me. We 're having a bad spell o' drought, ain't we? 'T is all tops of rocks about here, and we 're singed pretty brown." The captain chattered more briskly than was his wont; it would have been impossible to mistake that he was a sailor, for indeed that business stamps its followers with an unmistakable brand.

They had ventured upon a wetter spot than usual, and when the deacon pulled up his foot from the mire underneath with a resounding plop, his host proposed that they should seek the higher ground.

"Pretty smart at home?" asked the captain presently, to end a season of strange silence, and the deacon replied, at first somewhat sorrowfully, that they were middling, but explained directly that Eliza was away for a couple o' nights, and Warren too; it cost a great effort to speak the young man's name.

"Oh yes, I rec'lect," growled the captain, amiably. "You spoke about the golden weddin' yisterday; I should thought you 'd ha' gone too, along with 'Liza; such junkets ain't to be had every day. I must say I wish something or other would happen to take Mis' Hawkes's attention off of me," dropping his voice cautiously, as they came nearer to the house. "She's had a dreadful grumpy time of it, this week past, and looked homely enough to stop a clock. I used to be concerned along in the first of it, when I come off the sea, but I found it did n't do no hurt, and so I let her work, and first thing you know the wind is veered round again handsome, and off we go."

The deacon tried to laugh at this; they had seated themselves on the off side of the woodpile, under the shade of a great choke-pear tree. They had mounted the chopping-block, which was a stout elm log, standing on six legs, so that it looked like some stupid, blunderheaded creature of not altogether harmless disposition. The two old men were quite at its mercy

if it should canter away suddenly; but they talked for some minutes on ordinary subjects, and even left their position to go to inspect the pigs, and returned again, before the deacon arrived at an explanation of his errand.

It was a hard thing to do, and the captain turned and looked at him narrowly.

"I 've got to use the money right away as soon as I can have it. I want to see to some business this forenoon; you know I 've been calc'latin' to go to the South village to-day anyway. I did n't know for certain I should have to see about this, or I would n't have given you such short notice" — and here the deacon stopped again; it had come very near an untruth, this last sentence, and he would not cheat the man of whom he was asking so great a favor.

"I did n't fetch the papers along because I did n't know how 't would be with you," he explained; "they 'll make you safe. Austin's folks was talking round, this spring, to see if I wanted to part with our north field; his youngest son 's a smart fellow, and wants to set up for himself and have a truck farm. But I 'm only asking the loan for a time, ye know, neighbor," and the deacon looked anxiously at the old captain, and then leaned over, poking the chips about with the butt of his whip, which he had brought with him from the wagon.

"You shall have it," said the captain at last. "'T ain't everybody I 'd do such a thing to obleege, and I am only going to have my say about one thing, John: I never had no family of my own, and I suppose the feelin's of a father are somethin' I don't know nothing about, for or against; but I must say I hate to see ye an old man before your time, runnin' all out and looking discouraged on account o' favorin' Warren. You 'll come in astern o' the lighter, and he too; and if he 's been beseechin' ye to get this money together to further his notions, I 'm doing ye both a wrong to let ye have it. But I can't deny ye, and I 've got more than what ye say ye want, right here in the house as it happens. I was going to buy into that new three-masted schooner the Otises have got on the stocks now; I don't know but I am getting along in years to take hold of anything new in navigation."

"I ain't intending to let Warren have none o' this," said the deacon, humbly, and he longed to say more, and felt as if he never could hold up his head again among his fellows; and the time seemed very long and dreary before the captain came back from his house with the note ready to sign, and the eight hundred dollars ready to place in the deacon's gray and shaking hand. His benefactor pondered long

over this strange visit, longing to know what had happened, but he assured himself over and over that he could n't help letting him have it, and if never a cent of it came back there was nobody he was gladder to oblige. And John Price took his weary way to the South village of Dalton and paid a sum of seven hundred and thirty-five dollars to the creditors of the town. It was not until early in the afternoon that old Abel Stone suddenly bethought himself that something might have happened about that payment of Jerry Jackson's. If he were not growing old and a fool at last! Why had n't he asked the deacon if he had lost the money he had taken home from the selectmen's office! And when Mrs. Hawkes afterward ventured to ask him a harmless question he had grown red in the face and poured forth a torrent of nautical language which had nearly taken her breath away, without apparent reason or excuse. The captain, it must be confessed, was an uncommon swearer; he was one of the people who seem to serve as volcanoes or outlets for the concealed anger of poor human nature. It is difficult to explain why profanity seems so much more unlawful and shocking in some persons than in others, but there was something fairly amusing in the flurry and sputter of irreverent words which betokened excitement of any kind in

the mind of Captain Stone. He even forgot himself so far as to swear a little occasionally in the course of earnest exhortations in the evening prayer-meetings. There was not a better man or a sincerer Christian in the town of Dalton, though he had become a church-member late in life; and knowing this, there was never anything but a compassionate smile when he grew red in the face with zeal, and recommended those poor wretched *damned dogs* of heathen to mercy.

Nothing seemed to have changed outwardly at the South village. John Price did his errands and finished his business as quickly as possible, and avoided meeting his acquaintances, for he could not help fearing that he should be questioned about this miserable trouble. As he left the bank he could not help giving a sigh of relief, for that emergency was bridged over; and for a few minutes he kept himself by main force from looking at the future or asking himself "What next?"

But as he turned into his dust-powdered lane again at noon, the curious little faces of the mayweed blossoms seemed to stare up at him, and there was nobody to speak to him, and the house was like a tomb where all the years of his past were lying dead, and

all the pleasantness of life existed only in remembrance.

He began to wish for Warren in a way he never had before, and as he looked about the house he saw everywhere some evidence of his mechanical skill. Had not Eliza Storrow left home without a fear because, as she always said, Warren was as handy as a woman? The remembrance of his patient diligence at his own chosen work, his quietness under reproof, his evident discomfort at having to be dependent upon his father, linked to a perfect faith in the ultimate success of his plans, — the thought of all these things flashed through the old man's mind. "I wish I had waited 'till he told me what he had to say, yisterday," said Deacon Price to himself. "'T was strange about that fence too. He 's al'ays been willing to take holt and help whenever I spoke to him." He even came to believe that the boy had grown desperate, and in some emergency had gone in search of new materials for his machine. "He 's so forgitful," said the father, "he may have forgot to speak about the money, and 't was but a small-looking roll of bills. He 'll be back to-night, like 's not, as concerned as can be when he finds out what 't was he took." It was the way we only remember the good qualities of our friends who have died, and let the

bad ones fade out of sight, and so know the angels that were growing in them all the while, and out of our sight at last have thrown off the disguise and hindrance of the human shape.

Towards evening Jacob Austin, a neighbor, came into the yard on an errand, and was astonished to see how tired and old the deacon looked. He had left the oxen and their great load of coarse meadow hay standing at the end of the lane in the road, and he meant at first to shoulder the borrowed pitchfork and quickly rejoin them, but it was impossible. He asked if anything were the matter, and was answered that there was something trying about such a long spell of drought, which did not in the least satisfy his curiosity.

"No," said the deacon, "I 'm getting to be an old man, but I keep my health fairly. Eliza and Warren, they 're both off 'tending to their own concerns, but I make sure one or both of 'm 'll be back toward sundown." And Jacob, after casting about in his mind for anything further to say, mentioned again that 't was inconvenient to break a pitchfork right in the middle of loading a rack, and went away.

"Looked to me as if he had had a stroke," he told his family that night at supper time; and the con-

duct of Warren and Eliza Storrow, in going off and leaving the old deacon to shift for himself, was more severely commented upon.

But all this time, the latter half of that Tuesday afternoon, Eliza and her cousin Starbird were jogging toward home over the Dalton and Somerset hills. The colt was in good trim, and glad to be nearing his own familiar stall again, and struck out at an uncommonly good pace, though none of the swiftest at that. It was hardly six o'clock when the two tired-out and severely sunburnt women came into the yard. The deacon heard the high-pitched voice which he knew so well before he heard the sound of the wheels on the soft, dry turf, and went out to greet the new comers, half glad and half afraid. Eliza took it for granted that Warren was either in the workshop as usual, or, as she scornfully expressed it, roaming the hills, and did not ask for him. Cousin Starbird had accepted an invitation to tea, as her home was three miles farther on. They were both heavy women, and stiff from sitting still so long in the old wagon, and they grumbled a little as they walked toward the house.

"Yes, 't was a splendid occasion," Eliza answered the deacon, as he stood near, hitching the colt to a much gnawed post. "It all went off beautifully.

Everybody wanted to know where you was, an' Warren. There, we talked till we was all about dead, and eat ourselves sick; you never saw a handsomer table in *your* life. The old folks stood it well, but I see they 'd begun to kind o' give out at dinner-time to-day, — last night was the celebration, you know, because lots could come in the evenin' that was occupied by day. They wanted us to stop longer, but I see 't was best to break it up, and I 'd rather go over again by an' by, and spend the day in peace an' quietness, and have a good visit. We 've been saying, as we rode along, that we should n't be surprised if the old folks kind o' faded out after this, they 've been lookin' forward to it so long. Well, it 's all over, like a hoss-race;" and Eliza heaved a great sigh and went into the front room to open the blinds and make it less stuffy; then she removed her best bonnet in her own room, and presently came out to get tea, dressed in her familiar every-day calico gown.

The deacon was sitting by the open window, drumming on the sill; he had a trick of beating a slow tattoo with the ends of his queerly shaped fingers. They were long and dry, and somehow did not look as if they were useful, though John Price had been a hard-working man. Cousin Starbird had come down-stairs first, and had gone out to get a piece of

the golden wedding cake that had been left in the wagon. Eliza was busy in the pantry, scolding a good deal at the state she found it in.

"Whatever is this great thing in my pocket!" she exclaimed, for something had struck the table-leg as she came by it to bring the last brace of blueberry pies; and quickly fumbling in the pocket's depths she brought up in triumph the deacon's great brown wallet, and presented it to its owner.

"Good King Agrippy!" said the amazed man, snatching it, and then holding it and looking at it as if he were afraid it would bite.

"I ain't give it a thought, from that minute to this," said Eliza, who was not a little frightened. "I s'pose you 've been thinking you lost it. I thought you looked dreadful wamblecropped when I first saw you. Why, you see, I did n't undertake to wash yesterday mornin', because I did n't want the clothes a-layin' and mildewin', and I kind of thought perhaps I 'd put it off till next week, anyway, though it ain't my principle to do fortnight's washes. An' I had so much to do, gettin' ready to start, that I 'd gone in early and made up your bed and not put a clean sheet on; but you was busy takin' out the hoss after you come home at noon, and had your dinner to eat, and I had the time to spare, so I just slipped in and

stripped off the bedclothes then, and this come out from under the pillow. I meant to hand it to you when you come in from the barn, but I forgot it the next minute; you know we was belated about starting, and I was scatter-witted. I hope it ain't caused you no great inconvenience; you ain't wanted it for anything very special, have you? I s'pose 't was foolish to go fussin' about the bed, but I thought if you should be sick or anything" —

"Well, I've got it now," said the deacon, drawing a long breath. "I own I felt some uneasy about it," and he went out to the yard, and beyond it to the garden, and beyond the garden to the family burying-lot in the field. He would have gone to his parish church to pray if he had been a devout Catholic; as it was, this was the nearest approach he could make to a solemn thanksgiving.

Some of the oldest stones lay flat on the ground, and a network of blackberry vines covered them in part. The leaves were burnt by the sun, and the crickets scrambled among them as the deacon's footfall startled them. His first wife and his second wife both were buried there, their resting-places marked by a slate headstone and a marble one, and it was to this last that the old man went. His first wife had been a plain, hard-worked woman of sterling worth,

and his fortunes had declined from the day she left him to guard them alone; but her successor had been a pale and delicate school-teacher, who had roused some unsuspected longing for beauty and romance in John Price's otherwise prosaic nature. She had seemed like a windflower growing beside a ledge; and her husband had been forced to confess that she was not fit for a farmer's wife. If he could have had a combination of his two partners, he had once ventured to think, he would have been exactly suited. But it seemed to him, as he stood before the grave with his head bowed, the only way of making some sign of his sorrow, he had wrongfully accused an innocent man, his son and hers; and there he stayed, doing penance as best he could, until Eliza's voice called him to the house, and to some sort of comfortable existence and lack of self-reproof.

Before they had finished supper Warren came in, looking flushed and tired; but he took his seat at the table after a pleasant greeting, and the deacon passed him every plate within reach, treating him with uncommon politeness. The father could not help noticing that his son kept stealing glances at him, and that he looked pleased and satisfied. It seemed to him as if Warren must have known of his suspicions and of their happy ending, but it was discovered

presently that the long-toiled-over machine had been proved a success. Warren had taken it to his former employer at Lowell, who had promised, so great was his delight with it, to pay the expenses of getting the patent in exchange for a portion of the right. "He said there would be no end to the sale of it," said the young man, looking eagerly at his father's face. "I would n't have run off so yesterday, but I was so full of it I could n't bear to think of losing the cars, and I did n't want to say one word about this thing till I was sure.

"I expect I have been slack," he continued with evident effort, while they leaned over the garden fence, and he looked at his father appealingly. "But the fact is, I could n't seem to think of other things; it took all there was of me to keep right after that. But now I 'm going to take right hold and be some help about the place. I don't seem to want to touch a tool again for a year." He looked pale and restless; the reaction from his long excitement had set in.

The deacon gave a shaky laugh, and struck his son's shoulder by way of a clumsy caress. "Don't you go to frettin' yourself now," he said. "I ain't felt so pleased as I do to-day since the day you come into the world. I sort of felt certain then that you was goin' to be somebody, I do' know why 't was,"

— and he turned away suddenly toward the house. "If you are as rich as you say you be, I should n't wonder if between us 'we had n't better get them blinds painted, and smart up a little, another year. I declare, the old place has begun to look considerable gone to seed."

That night a great thunder-shower broke the spell of the long drought, and afterward, until morning, the rain fell fast upon the thirsty ground. It was a good night to sleep, Eliza had said, as she wearily climbed the crooked backstairs at nine o'clock, for there was already a coolness in the air. She never was told the whole of the story about the wallet, for when she heard part of it she only said it was just like a man, — they were generally the most helpless creatur's alive. He might have known she had put it away somewhere. Why did n't he come and ask her? He never seemed to mistrust that it was a direct p'inting out of his duty to ride over to Somerset to the gathering, and just speak to the folks.

In the early morning, while it was cool and wet, the deacon drove up to the captain's farm, and the two selectmen perched on the chopping log again, and the confession was made and listened to with great gravity. The captain swore roundly in his

satisfaction, and said he was going to have a square talk with Warren, and advise with him a little, for fear that those landsharks down in Lowell should undertake to cheat him. He stowed away the repayment of the loan in one of his big pockets, as if it were of little consequence to him, but he announced with considerable satisfaction at the next selectmen's meeting, that he owned a few planks of that three-masted schooner which the Otises were about ready to launch. And he winked at Deacon Price in a way that their brother Kendall was not able to understand.

MISS DEBBY'S NEIGHBORS.

THERE is a class of elderly New England women which is fast dying out: — those good souls who have sprung from a soil full of the true New England instincts; who were used to the old-fashioned ways, and whose minds were stored with quaint country lore and tradition. The fashions of the newer generations do not reach them; they are quite unconscious of the western spirit and enterprise, and belong to the old days, and to a fast-disappearing order of things.

But a shrewder person does not exist than the spokeswoman of the following reminiscences, whose simple history can be quickly told, since she spent her early life on a lonely farm, leaving it only once for any length of time, — one winter when she learned her trade of tailoress. She afterward sewed for her neighbors, and enjoyed a famous reputation for her skill; but year by year, as she grew older, there was less to do, and at last, to use her own expression, "Everybody got into the way of buying cheap, ready-

made-up clothes, just to save 'em a little trouble," and she found herself out of business, or nearly so. After her mother's death, and that of her favorite younger brother Jonas, she left the farm and came to a little house in the village, where she lived most comfortably the rest of her life, having a small property which she used most sensibly. She was always ready to render any special service with her needle, and was a most welcome guest in any household, and a most efficient helper. To be in the same room with her for a while was sure to be profitable, and as she grew older she was delighted to recall the people and events of her earlier life, always filling her descriptions with wise reflections and much quaint humor. She always insisted, not without truth, that the railroads were making everybody look and act of a piece, and that the young folks were more alike than people of her own day. It is impossible to give the delightfulness of her talk in any written words, as well as many of its peculiarities, for her way of going round Robin Hood's barn between the beginning of her story and its end can hardly be followed at all, and certainly not in her own dear loitering footsteps.

On an idle day her most devoted listener thought there was nothing better worth doing than to watch this good soul at work. A book was held open for

the looks of the thing, but presently it was allowed to flutter its leaves and close, for Miss Debby began without any apparent provocation : —

"They may say whatever they have a mind to, but they can't persuade me that there 's no such thing as special providences," and she twitched her strong linen thread so angrily through the carpet she was sewing, that it snapped and the big needle flew into the air. It had to be found before any further remarks could be made, and the listener also knelt down to search for it. After a while it was discovered clinging to Miss Debby's own dress, and after reharnessing it she went to work again at her long seam. It was always significant of a succession of Miss Debby's opinions when she quoted and berated certain imaginary persons whom she designated as "They," who stood for the opposite side of the question, and who merited usually her deepest scorn and fullest antagonism. Her remarks to these offending parties were always prefaced with "I tell 'em," and to the listener's mind "they" always stood rebuked, but not convinced, in spiritual form it may be, but most intense reality ; a little group as solemn as Miss Debby herself. Once the listener ventured to ask who "they" were, in her early childhood, but she was only answered by a frown. Miss Debby knew

as well as any one the difference between figurative language and a lie. Sometimes they said what was right and proper, and were treated accordingly; but very seldom, and on this occasion it seemed that they had ventured to trifle with sacred things.

"I suppose you 're too young to remember John Ashby's grandmother? A good woman she was, and she had a dreadful time with her family. They never could keep the peace, and there was always as many as two of them who did n't speak with each other. It seems to come down from generation to generation like a —— *curse!*" And Miss Debby spoke the last word as if she had meant it partly for her thread, which had again knotted and caught, and she snatched the offered scissors without a word, but said peaceably, after a minute or two, that the thread was n't what it used to be. The next needleful proved more successful, and the listener asked if the Ashbys were getting on comfortably at present.

"They always behave as if they thought they needed nothing," was the response. "Not that I mean that they are any ways contented, but they never will give in that other folks holds a candle to 'em. There 's one kind of pride that I do hate, — when folks is satisfied with their selves and don't see no need of improvement. I believe in self-respect, but

I believe in respecting other folks's rights as much as your own; but it takes an Ashby to ride right over you. I tell 'em it's the spirit of the tyrants of old, and it 's the kind of pride that goes before a fall. John Ashby's grandmother was a clever little woman as ever stepped. She came from over Hardwick way, and I think she kep' 'em kind of decent-behaved as long as she was round; but she got wore out a doin' of it, an' went down to her grave in a quick consumption. My mother set up with her the night she died. It was in May, towards the latter part, and an awful rainy night. It was the storm that always comes in apple-blossom time. I remember well that mother come crying home in the morning and told us Mis' Ashby was dead. She brought Marilly with her, that was about my own age, and was taken away within six months afterwards. She pined herself to death for her mother, and when she caught the scarlet fever she went as quick as cherry-bloom when it 's just ready to fall and a wind strikes it. She wa'n't like the rest of 'em. She took after her mother's folks altogether.

"You know our farm was right next to theirs, — the one Asa Hopper owns now, but he 's let it all run out, — and so, as we lived some ways from the stores, we had to be neighborly, for we depended on each

other for a good many things. Families in lonesome places get out of one supply and another, and have to borrow until they get a chance to send to the village; or sometimes in a busy season some of the folks would have to leave work and be gone half a day. Land, you don't know nothing about old times, and the life that used to go on about here. You can't step into a house anywheres now that there ain't the county map and they don't fetch out the photograph book; and in every district you 'll find all the folks has got the same chromo picture hung up, and all sorts of luxuries and makeshifts o' splendor that would have made the folks I was fetched up by stare their eyes out o' their heads. It was all we could do to keep along then; and if anybody was called rich, it was only because he had a great sight of land, — and then it was drudge, drudge the harder to pay the taxes. There was hardly any ready money; and I recollect well that old Tommy Simms was reputed wealthy, and it was told over fifty times a year that he 'd got a solid four thousand dollars in the bank. He strutted round like a turkey-cock, and thought he ought to have his first say about everything that was going.

"I was talking about the Ashbys, was n't I? I do' know 's I ever told you about the fight they had after their father died about the old house. Joseph was

married to a girl he met in camp-meeting time, who had a little property — two or three hundred dollars — from an old great uncle that she 'd been keeping house for; and I don't know what other plans she may have had for spending of her means, but she laid most of it out in a husband; for Joseph never cared any great about her that I could see, though he always treated her well enough. She was a poor ignorant sort of thing, seven years older than he was; but she had a pleasant kind of a face, and seemed like an overgrown girl of six or eight years old. I remember just after they was married Joseph was taken down with a quinsy sore throat, — being always subject to them, — and mother was over in the forenoon, and she was one that was always giving right hand and left, and she told Susan Ellen — that was his wife — to step over in the afternoon and she would give her some blackberry preserve for him; she had some that was nice and it was very healing. So along about half-past one o'clock, just as we had got the kitchen cleared, and mother and I had got out the big wheels to spin a few rolls, — we always liked to spin together, and mother was always good company; — my brother Jonas — that was the youngest of us — looked out of the window, and says he: 'Here comes Joe Ashby's wife with a six-quart pail.'

"Mother she began to shake all over with a laugh she tried to swallow down, but I did n't know what it was all about, and in come poor Susan Ellen and lit on the edge of the first chair and set the pail down beside of her. We tried to make her feel welcome, and spoke about everything we could contrive, seein' as it was the first time she 'd been over; and she seemed grateful and did the best she could, and lost her strangeness with mother right away, for mother was the best hand to make folks feel to home with her that I ever come across. There ain't many like her now, nor never was, I tell 'em. But there wa'n't nothing said about the six-quart pail, and there it set on the floor, until Susan Ellen said she must be going and mentioned that there was something said about a remedy for Joseph's throat. 'Oh, yes,' says mother, and she brought out the little stone jar she kept the preserve in, and there wa'n't more than the half of it full. Susan Ellen took up the cover off the pail, and I walked off into the bedroom, for I thought I should laugh, certain. Mother put in a big spoonful, and another, and I heard 'em drop, and she went on with one or two more, and then she give up. 'I 'd give you the jar and welcome,' she says, 'but I ain't very well off for preserves, and I was kind of counting on this for tea in case my brother's

folks are over.' Susan Ellen thanked her, and said Joseph would be obliged, and back she went acrost the pasture. I can see that big tin pail now a-shining in the sun.

"The old man was alive then, and he took a great spite against poor Susan Ellen, though he never would if he had n't been set on by John; and whether he was mad because Joseph had stepped in to so much good money or what, I don't know, — but he twitted him about her, and at last he and the old man between 'em was too much to bear, and Joe fitted up a couple o' rooms for himself in a building he 'd put up for a kind of work-shop. He used to carpenter by spells, and he clapboarded it and made it as comfortable as he could, and he ordered John out of it for good and all; but he and Susan Ellen both treated the old sir the best they knew how, and Joseph kept right on with his farm work same as ever, and meant to lay up a little more money to join with his wife's, and push off as soon as he could for the sake of peace, though if there was anybody set by the farm it was Joseph. He was to blame for some things, — I never saw an Ashby that was n't, — and I dare say he was aggravating. They were clearing a piece of woodland that winter, and the old man was laid up in the house with the rheumatism, off and

on, and that made him fractious, and he and John connived together, till one day Joseph and Susan Ellen had taken the sleigh and gone to Freeport Four Corners to get some flour and one thing and another, and to have the horse shod beside, so they was likely to be gone two or three hours. John Jacobs was going by with his oxen, and John Ashby and the old man hailed him, and said they 'd give him a dollar if he 'd help 'em, and they hitched the two yoke, his and their'n, to Joseph's house. There wa'n't any foundation to speak of, the sills set right on the ground, and he 'd banked it up with a few old boards and some pine spills and sand and stuff, just to keep the cold out. There wa'n't but a little snow, and the roads was smooth and icy, and they slipped it along as if it had been a hand-sled, and got it down the road a half a mile or so to the fork of the roads, and left it settin' there right on the heater-piece. Jacobs told afterward that he kind of disliked to do it, but he thought as long as their minds were set, he might as well have the dollar as anybody. He said when the house give a slew on a sideling piece in the road, he heard some of the crockery-ware smash down, and a branch of an oak they passed by caught hold of the stove-pipe that come out through one of the walls, and give that a wrench, but he guessed there

wa'n't no great damage. Joseph may have given 'em some provocation before he went away in the morning, — I don't know *but* he did, and I don't know *as* he did, — but at any rate when he was coming home late in the afternoon he caught sight of his house (some of our folks was right behind, and they saw him), and he stood right up in the sleigh and shook his fist, he was so mad; but afterwards he bu'st out laughin'. It did look kind of curi's; it wa'n't bigger than a front entry, and it set up so pert right there on the heater-piece, as if he was calc'latin' to farm it. The folks said Susan Ellen covered up her face in her shawl and begun to cry. I s'pose the pore thing was discouraged. Joseph was awful mad, — he was kind of laughing and cryin' together. Our folks stopped and asked him if there was anything they could do, and he said no; but Susan Ellen went in to view how things were, and they made up a fire, and then Joe took the horse home, and I guess they had it hot and heavy. Nobody supposed they 'd ever make up 'less there was a funeral in the family to bring 'em together, the fight had gone so far, — but 'long in the winter old Mr. Ashby, the boys' father, was taken down with a spell o' sickness, and there wa'n't anybody they could get to come and look after the house. The doctor hunted, and they all hunted,

but there did n't seem to be anybody — 't wa'n't so thick settled as now, and there was no spare help — so John had to eat humble pie, and go and ask Susan Ellen if she would n't come back and let by-gones be by-gones. She was as good-natured a creatur' as ever stepped, and did the best she knew, and she spoke up as pleasant as could be, and said she 'd go right off that afternoon and help 'em through.

"The old Ashby had been a hard drinker in his day and he was all broke down. Nobody ever saw him that he could n't walk straight, but he got a crooked disposition out of it, if nothing else. I s'pose there never was a man loved sperit better. They said one year he was over to Cyrus Parker's to help with the haying, and there was a jug o' New England rum over by the spring with some gingerbread and cheese and stuff; and he went over about every half an hour to take something, and along about half-past ten he got the jug middling low, so he went to fill it up with a little water, and lost holt of it and it sunk, and they said he drunk the spring dry three times!

"Joe and Susan Ellen stayed there at the old place well into the summer, and then after planting they moved down to the Four Corners where they had bought a nice little place. Joe did well there, — he carried on the carpenter trade, and got smoothed

down considerable, being amongst folks. John he married a Pecker girl, and got his match too; she was the only living soul he ever was afraid of. They lived on there a spell and — why, they must have lived there all of fifteen or twenty years, now I come to think of it, for the time they moved was after the railroad was built. 'T was along in the winter and his wife she got a notion to buy a place down to the Falls below the Corners after the mills got started and have John work in the spinning-room while she took boarders. She said 't wa'n't no use staying on the farm, they could n't make a living off from it now they 'd cut the growth. Joe's folks and she never could get along, and they said she was dreadfully riled up hearing how much Joe was getting in the machine shop.

"They need n't tell me about special providences being all moonshine," said Miss Debby for the second time, "if here wa'n't a plain one, I 'll never say one word more about it. You see, that very time Joe Ashby got a splinter in his eye and they were afraid he was going to lose his sight, and he got a notion that he wanted to go back to farming. He always set everything by the old place, and he had a boy growing up that neither took to his book nor to mill work, and he wanted to farm it too. So Joe got hold

of John one day when he come in with some wood, and asked him why he would n't take his place for a year or two, if he wanted to get to the village, and let him go out to the old place. My brother Jonas was standin' right by and heard 'em and said he never heard nobody speak civiller. But John swore and said he wa'n't going to be caught in no such a trap as that. His father left him the place and he was going to do as he 'd a mind to. There 'd be'n trouble about the property, for old Mr. Ashby had given Joe some money he had in the bank. Joe had got to be well off, he could have bought most any farm about here, but he wanted the old place 'count of his attachment. He set everything by his mother, spite of her being dead so long. John had n't done very well spite of his being so sharp, but he let out the best of the farm on shares, and bought a mis'able sham-built little house down close by the mills, — and then some idea or other got into his head to fit that up to let and move it to one side of the lot, and haul down the old house from the farm to live in themselves. There wa'n't no time to lose, else the snow would be gone; so he got a gang o' men up there and put shoes underneath the sills, and then they assembled all the oxen they could call in, and started. Mother was living then, though she 'd got

to be very feeble, and when they come for our yoke she wouldn't have Jonas let 'em go. She said the old house ought to stay in its place. Everybody had been telling John Ashby that the road was too hilly, and besides the house was too old to move, they 'd rack it all to pieces dragging it so fur; but he would n't listen to no reason.

"I never saw mother so stirred up as she was that day, and when she see the old thing a moving she burst right out crying. We could see one end of it looking over the slope of the hill in the pasture between it and our house. There was two windows that looked our way, and I know Mis' Ashby used to hang a piece o' something white out o' one of 'em when she wanted mother to step over for anything. They set a good deal by each other, and Mis' Ashby was a lame woman. I should n't ha' thought John would had 'em haul the house right over the little gardin she thought so much of, and broke down the laylocks and flowering currant she set everything by. I remember when she died I was n't more 'n seven or eight year old, it was all in full bloom and mother she broke off a branch and laid into the coffin. I do' know as I 've ever seen any since or set in a room and had the sweetness of it blow in at the windows without remembering that day, — 't was the first fu-

neral I ever went to, and that may be some reason. Well, the old house started off and mother watched it as long as she could see it. She was sort o' feeble herself then, as I said, and we went on with the work, — 't was a Saturday, and we was baking and churning and getting things to rights generally. Jonas had been over in the swamp getting out some wood he 'd cut earlier in the winter — and along in the afternoon he come in and said he s'posed I would n't want to ride down to the Corners so late, and I said I did feel just like it, so we started off. We went the Birch Ridge road, because he wanted to see somebody over that way, — and when we was going home by the straight road, Jonas laughed and said we had n't seen anything of John Ashby's moving, and he guessed he 'd got stuck somewhere. He was glad he had n't nothing to do with it. We drove along pretty quick, for we were some belated, and we did n't like to leave mother all alone after it come dark. All of a sudden Jonas stood up in the sleigh, and says he, 'I don't believe but the cars is off the track;' and I looked and there did seem to be something the matter with 'em. They had n't been running more than a couple o' years then, and we was prepared for anything.

"Jonas he whipped up the horse and we got there pretty quick, and I'll be bound if the Ashby house

had n't got stuck fast right on the track, and stir it one way or another they could n't. They 'd been there since quarter-past one, pulling and hauling, — and the men was all hoarse with yelling, and the cars had come from both ways and met there, — one each side of the crossing, — and the passengers was walking about, scolding and swearing, — and somebody 'd gone and lit up a gre't bonfire. You never see such a sight in all your life! I happened to look up at the old house, and there were them two top windows that used to look over to our place, and they had caught the shine of the firelight, and made the poor old thing look as if it was scared to death. The men was banging at it with axes and crowbars, and it was dreadful distressing. You pitied it as if it was a live creatur'. It come from such a quiet place, and always looked kind of comfortable, though so much war had gone on amongst the Ashbys. I tell you it was a judgment on John, for they got it shoved back after a while, and then would n't touch it again, — not one of the men, — nor let their oxen. The plastering was all stove, and the outside walls all wrenched apart, — and John never did anything more about it; but let it set there all summer, till it burnt down, and there was an end, one night in September. They supposed some traveling folks slept in it and

set it afire, or else some boys did it for fun. I was glad it was out of the way. One day, I know, I was coming by with mother, and she said it made her feel bad to see the little strips of leather by the fore door, where Mis' Ashby had nailed up a rosebush once. There! there ain't an Ashby alive now of the old stock, except young John. Joe's son went off to sea, and I believe he was lost somewhere in the China seas, or else he died of a fever; I seem to forget. He was called a smart boy, but he never could seem to settle down to anything. Sometimes I wonder folks is as good as they be, when I consider what comes to 'em from their folks before 'em, and how they 're misshaped by nature. Them Ashbys never was like other folks, and yet some good streak or other there was in every one of 'em. You can't expect much from such hindered creatur's, — it 's just like beratin' a black and white cat for being a poor mouser. It ain't her fault that the mice see her quicker than they can a gray one. If you get one of them masterful dispositions put with a good strong will towards the right, that 's what makes the best of men; but all them Ashbys cared about was to grasp and get, and be cap'ns. They liked to see other folks put down, just as if it was going to set them up. And they did n't know nothing. They make me think

of some o' them old marauders that used to hive up into their castles, in old times, and then go out a-oversetting and plundering. And I tell you that same sperit was in 'em. They was born a couple o' hundred years too late. Kind of left-over folks, as it were." And Miss Debby indulged in a quiet chuckle as she bent over her work. "John he got captured by his wife, — she carried too many guns for him. I believe he died very poor and her own son would n't support her, so she died over in Freeport poor-house. And Joe got along better; his wife was clever but rather slack, and it took her a good while to see through things. She married again pretty quick after he died. She had as much as seven or eight thousand dollars, and she was taken just as she stood by a roving preacher that was holding meetings here in the winter time. He sold out her place here, and they went up country somewheres that he come from. Her boy was lost before that, so there was nothing to hinder her. There, don't you think I 'm always a-fault-finding! When I get hold of the real thing in folks, I stick to 'em, — but there 's an awful sight of poor material walking about that ain't worth the ground it steps on. But when I look back a little ways, I can't blame some of 'em; though it does often seem as if people might do better if they only set to work and tried.

I must say I always do feel pleased when I think how mad John was, — this John's father, — when he could n't do just as he 'd a mind to with the pore old house. I could n't help thinking of Joe's mansion, that he and his father hauled down to the heater piece in the fork of the roads. Sometimes I wonder where them Ashbys all went to. They 'd mistake one place for the other in the next world, for 't would make heaven out o' hell, because they could be disagreeing with somebody, and — well, I don't know, — I 'm sure they kep' a good row going while they was in this world. Only with mother; — somehow she could get along with anybody, and not always give 'em their way either."

TOM'S HUSBAND.

I SHALL not dwell long upon the circumstances that led to the marriage of my hero and heroine; though their courtship was, to them, the only one that has ever noticeably approached the ideal, it had many aspects in which it was entirely commonplace in other people's eyes. While the world in general smiles at lovers with kindly approval and sympathy, it refuses to be aware of the unprecedented delight which is amazing to the lovers themselves.

But, as has been true in many other cases, when they were at last married, the most ideal of situations was found to have been changed to the most practical. Instead of having shared their original duties, and, as school-boys would say, going halves, they discovered that the cares of life had been doubled. This led to some distressing moments for both our friends; they understood suddenly that instead of dwelling in heaven they were still upon earth, and had made themselves slaves to new laws and limitations. In-

stead of being freer and happier than ever before, they had assumed new responsibilities; they had established a new household, and must fulfill in some way or another the obligations of it. They looked back with affection to their engagement; they had been longing to have each other to themselves, apart from the world, but it seemed that they never felt so keenly that they were still units in modern society. Since Adam and Eve were in Paradise, before the devil joined them, nobody has had a chance to imitate that unlucky couple. In some respects they told the truth when, twenty times a day, they said that life had never been so pleasant before; but there were mental reservations on either side which might have subjected them to the accusation of lying. Somehow, there was a little feeling of disappointment, and they caught themselves wondering — though they would have died sooner than confess it — whether they were quite so happy as they had expected. The truth was, they were much happier than people usually are, for they had an uncommon capacity for enjoyment. For a little while they were like a sail-boat that is beating and has to drift a few minutes before it can catch the wind and start off on the other tack. And they had the same feeling, too, that any one is likely to have who has been long pursuing

some object of his ambition or desire. Whether it is a coin, or a picture, or a stray volume of some old edition of Shakespeare, or whether it is an office under government or a lover, when fairly in one's grasp there is a loss of the eagerness that was felt in pursuit. Satisfaction, even after one has dined well, is not so interesting and eager a feeling as hunger.

My hero and heroine were reasonably well established to begin with: they each had some money, though Mr. Wilson had most. His father had at one time been a rich man, but with the decline, a few years before, of manufacturing interests, he had become, mostly through the fault of others, somewhat involved; and at the time of his death his affairs were in such a condition that it was still a question whether a very large sum or a moderately large one would represent his estate. Mrs. Wilson, Tom's stepmother, was somewhat of an invalid; she suffered severely at times with asthma, but she was almost entirely relieved by living in another part of the country. While her husband lived, she had accepted her illness as inevitable, and rarely left home; but during the last few years she had lived in Philadelphia with her own people, making short and wheezing visits only from time to time, and had not undergone a voluntary period of suffering since the occasion

of Tom's marriage, which she had entirely approved. She had a sufficient property of her own, and she and Tom were independent of each other in that way. Her only other step-child was a daughter, who had married a navy officer, and had at this time gone out to spend three years (or less) with her husband, who had been ordered to Japan.

It is not unfrequently noticed that in many marriages one of the persons who choose each other as partners for life is said to have thrown himself or herself away, and the relatives and friends look on with dismal forebodings and ill-concealed submission. In this case it was the wife who might have done so much better, according to public opinion. She did not think so herself, luckily, either before marriage or afterward, and I do not think it occurred to her to picture to herself the sort of career which would have been her alternative. She had been an only child, and had usually taken her own way. Some one once said that it was a great pity that she had not been obliged to work for her living, for she had inherited a most uncommon business talent, and, without being disreputably keen at a bargain, her insight into the practical working of affairs was very clear and far-reaching. Her father, who had also been a manufacturer, like Tom's, had often said it had been a mistake

that she was a girl instead of a boy. Such executive ability as hers is often wasted in the more contracted sphere of women, and is apt to be more a disadvantage than a help. She was too independent and self-reliant for a wife; it would seem at first thought that she needed a wife herself more than she did a husband. Most men like best the women whose natures cling and appeal to theirs for protection. But Tom Wilson, while he did not wish to be protected himself, liked these very qualities in his wife which would have displeased some other men; to tell the truth, he was very much in love with his wife just as she was. He was a successful collector of almost everything but money, and during a great part of his life he had been an invalid, and he had grown, as he laughingly confessed, very old-womanish. He had been badly lamed, when a boy, by being caught in some machinery in his father's mill, near which he was idling one afternoon, and though he had almost entirely outgrown the effect of his injury, it had not been until after many years. He had been in college, but his eyes had given out there, and he had been obliged to leave in the middle of his junior year, though he had kept up a pleasant intercourse with the members of his class, with whom he had been a great favorite. He was a good deal of an idler in the

world. I do not think his ambition, except in the case of securing Mary Dunn for his wife, had ever been distinct; he seemed to make the most he could of each day as it came, without making all his days' works tend toward some grand result, and go toward the upbuilding of some grand plan and purpose. He consequently gave no promise of being either distinguished or great. When his eyes would allow, he was an indefatigable reader; and although he would have said that he read only for amusement, yet he amused himself with books that were well worth the time he spent over them.

The house where he lived nominally belonged to his step-mother, but she had taken for granted that Tom would bring his wife home to it, and assured him that it should be to all intents and purposes his. Tom was deeply attached to the old place, which was altogether the pleasantest in town. He had kept bachelor's hall there most of the time since his father's death, and he had taken great pleasure, before his marriage, in refitting it to some extent, though it was already comfortable and furnished in remarkably good taste. People said of him that if it had not been for his illnesses, and if he had been a poor boy, he probably would have made something of himself. As it was, he was not very well known by the towns-

people, being somewhat reserved, and not taking much interest in their every-day subjects of conversation. Nobody liked him so well as they liked his wife, yet there was no reason why he should be disliked enough to have much said about him.

After our friends had been married for some time, and had outlived the first strangeness of the new order of things, and had done their duty to their neighbors with so much apparent willingness and generosity that even Tom himself was liked a great deal better than he ever had been before, they were sitting together one stormy evening in the library, before the fire. Mrs. Wilson had been reading Tom the letters which had come to him by the night's mail. There was a long one from his sister in Nagasaki, which had been written with a good deal of ill-disguised reproach. She complained of the smallness of the income of her share in her father's estate, and said that she had been assured by American friends that the smaller mills were starting up everywhere, and beginning to do well again. Since so much of their money was invested in the factory, she had been surprised and sorry to find by Tom's last letters that he had seemed to have no idea of putting in a proper person as superintendent, and going to work again. Four per cent. on her other property,

which she had been told she must soon expect instead of eight, would make a great difference to her. A navy captain in a foreign port was obliged to entertain a great deal, and Tom must know that it cost them much more to live than it did him, and ought to think of their interests. She hoped he would talk over what was best to be done with their mother (who had been made executor, with Tom, of his father's will).

Tom laughed a little, but looked disturbed. His wife had said something to the same effect, and his mother had spoken once or twice in her letters of the prospect of starting the mill again. He was not a bit of a business man, and he did not feel certain, with the theories which he had arrived at of the state of the country, that it was safe yet to spend the money which would have to be spent in putting the mill in order. "They think that the minute it is going again we shall be making money hand over hand, just as father did when we were children," he said. "It is going to cost us no end of money before we can make anything. Before father died he meant to put in a good deal of new machinery, I remember. I don't know anything about the business myself, and I would have sold out long ago if I had had an offer that came anywhere near the value. The larger

mills are the only ones that are good for anything now, and we should have to bring a crowd of French Canadians here; the day is past for the people who live in this part of the country to go into the factory again. Even the Irish all go West when they come into the country, and don't come to places like this any more."

"But there are a good many of the old work-people down in the village," said Mrs. Wilson. "Jack Towne asked me the other day if you were n't going to start up in the spring."

Tom moved uneasily in his chair. "I 'll put you in for superintendent, if you like," he said, half angrily, whereupon Mary threw the newspaper at him; but by the time he had thrown it back he was in good humor again.

"Do you know, Tom," she said, with amazing seriousness, "that I believe I should like nothing in the world so much as to be the head of a large business? I hate keeping house, — I always did; and I never did so much of it in all my life put together as I have since I have been married. I suppose it is n't womanly to say so, but if I could escape from the whole thing I believe I should be perfectly happy. If you get rich when the mill is going again, I shall beg for a housekeeper, and shirk everything. I give

you fair warning. I don't believe I keep this house half so well as you did before I came here."

Tom's eyes twinkled. "I am going to have that glory, — I don't think you do, Polly; but you can't say that I have not been forbearing. I certainly have not told you more than twice how we used to have things cooked. I'm not going to be your kitchen-colonel."

"Of course it seemed the proper thing to do," said his wife, meditatively; "but I think we should have been even happier than we have if I had been spared it. I have had some days of wretchedness that I shudder to think of. I never know what to have for breakfast; and I ought not to say it, but I don't mind the sight of dust. I look upon housekeeping as my life's great discipline;" and at this pathetic confession they both laughed heartily.

"I've a great mind to take it off your hands," said Tom. "I always rather liked it, to tell the truth, and I ought to be a better housekeeper, — I have been at it for five years; though housekeeping for one is different from what it is for two, and one of them a woman. You see you have brought a different element into my family. Luckily, the servants are pretty well drilled. I do think you upset them a good deal at first!"

Mary Wilson smiled as if she only half heard what he was saying. She drummed with her foot on the floor and looked intently at the fire, and presently gave it a vigorous poking. "Well?" said Tom, after he had waited patiently as long as he could.

"Tom! I'm going to propose something to you. I wish you would really do as you said, and take all the home affairs under your care, and let me start the mill. I am certain I could manage it. Of course I should get people who understood the thing to teach me. I believe I was made for it; I should like it above all things. And this is what I will do: I will bear the cost of starting it, myself, — I think I have money enough, or can get it; and if I have not put affairs in the right trim at the end of a year I will stop, and you may make some other arrangement. If I have, you and your mother and sister can pay me back."

"So I am going to be the wife, and you the husband," said Tom, a little indignantly; "at least, that is what people will say. It 's a regular Darby and Joan affair, and you think you can do more work in a day than I can do in three. Do you know that you must go to town to buy cotton? And do you know there are a thousand things about it that you don't know?"

"And never will?" said Mary, with perfect good humor "Why, Tom, I can learn as well as you, and a good deal better, for I like business, and you don't. You forget that I was always father's right-hand man after I was a dozen years old, and that you have let me invest my money and some of your own, and I have n't made a blunder yet."

Tom thought that his wife had never looked so handsome or so happy. "I don't care, I should rather like the fun of knowing what people will say. It is a new departure, at any rate. Women think they can do everything better than men in these days, but I 'm the first man, apparently, who has wished he were a woman."

"Of course people will laugh," said Mary, "but they will say that it 's just like me, and think I am fortunate to have married a man who will let me do as I choose. I don't see why it is n't sensible: you will be living exactly as you were before you married, as to home affairs; and since it was a good thing for you to know something about housekeeping then, I can't imagine why you should n't go on with it now, since it makes me miserable, and I am wasting a fine business talent while I do it. What do we care for people's talking about it?"

"It seems to me that it is something like women's

smoking: it is n't wicked, but it is n't the custom of the country. And I don't like the idea of your going among business men. Of course I should be above going with you, and having people think I must be an idiot; they would say that you married a manufacturing interest, and I was thrown in. I can foresee that my pride is going to be humbled to the dust in every way," Tom declared in mournful tones, and began to shake with laughter. "It is one of your lovely castles in the air, dear Polly, but an old brick mill needs a better foundation than the clouds. No, I 'll look around, and get an honest, experienced man for agent. I suppose it 's the best thing we can do, for the machinery ought not to lie still any longer; but I mean to sell the factory as soon as I can. I devoutly wish it would take fire, for the insurance would be the best price we are likely to get. That is a famous letter from Alice! I am afraid the captain has been growling over his pay, or they have been giving too many little dinners on board ship. If we were rid of the mill, you and I might go out there this winter. It would be capital fun."

Mary smiled again in an absent-minded way. Tom had an uneasy feeling that he had not heard the end of it yet, but nothing more was said for a day or two.

When Mrs. Tom Wilson announced, with no apparent thought of being contradicted, that she had entirely made up her mind, and she meant to see those men who had been overseers of the different departments, who still lived in the village, and have the mill put in order at once, Tom looked disturbed, but made no opposition; and soon after breakfast his wife formally presented him with a handful of keys, and told him there was some lamb in the house for dinner; and presently he heard the wheels of her little phaeton rattling off down the road. I should be untruthful if I tried to persuade any one that he was not provoked; he thought she would at least have waited for his formal permission, and at first he meant to take another horse, and chase her, and bring her back in disgrace, and put a stop to the whole thing. But something assured him that she knew what she was about, and he determined to let her have her own way. If she failed, it might do no harm, and this was the only ungallant thought he gave her. He was sure that she would do nothing unladylike, or be unmindful of his dignity; and he believed it would be looked upon as one of her odd, independent freaks, which always had won respect in the end, however much they had been laughed at in the beginning. "Susan," said he, as that estimable

person went by the door with the dust-pan, "you may tell Catherine to come to me for orders about the house, and you may do so yourself. I am going to take charge again, as I did before I was married. It is no trouble to me, and Mrs. Wilson dislikes it. Besides, she is going into business, and will have a great deal else to think of."

"Yes, sir; very well, sir," said Susan, who was suddenly moved to ask so many questions that she was utterly silent. But her master looked very happy; there was evidently no disapproval of his wife; and she went on up the stairs, and began to sweep them down, knocking the dust-brush about excitedly, as if she were trying to kill a descending colony of insects.

Tom went out to the stable and mounted his horse, which had been waiting for him to take his customary after-breakfast ride to the post-office, and he galloped down the road in quest of the phaeton. He saw Mary talking with Jack Towne, who had been an overseer and a valued workman of his father's. He was looking much surprised and pleased.

"I was n't caring so much about getting work, myself," he explained; "I 've got what will carry me and my wife through; but it 'll be better for the young folks about here to work near home. My

nephews are wanting something to do; they were going to Lynn next week. I don't say but I should like to be to work in the old place again. I've sort of missed it, since we shut down."

"I'm sorry I was so long in overtaking you," said Tom, politely, to his wife. "Well, Jack, did Mrs. Wilson tell you she's going to start the mill? You must give her all the help you can."

"'Deed I will," said Mr. Towne, gallantly, without a bit of astonishment.

"I don't know much about the business yet," said Mrs. Wilson, who had been a little overcome at Jack Towne's lingo of the different rooms and machinery, and who felt an overpowering sense of having a great deal before her in the next few weeks. "By the time the mill is ready, I will be ready, too," she said, taking heart a little; and Tom, who was quick to understand her moods, could not help laughing, as he rode alongside. "We want a new barrel of flour, Tom, dear," she said, by way of punishment for his untimely mirth.

If she lost courage in the long delay, or was disheartened at the steady call for funds, she made no sign; and after a while the mill started up, and her cares were lightened, so that she told Tom that before next pay day she would like to go to Boston for

a few days, and go to the theatre, and have a frolic and a rest. She really looked pale and thin, and she said she never worked so hard in all her life; but nobody knew how happy she was, and she was so glad she had married Tom, for some men would have laughed at it.

"I laughed at it," said Tom, meekly. "All is, if I don't cry by and by, because I am a beggar, I shall be lucky." But Mary looked fearlessly serene, and said that there was no danger at present.

It would have been ridiculous to expect a dividend the first year, though the Nagasaki people were pacified with difficulty. All the business letters came to Tom's address, and everybody who was not directly concerned thought that he was the motive power of the reawakened enterprise. Sometimes business people came to the mill, and were amazed at having to confer with Mrs. Wilson, but they soon had to respect her talents and her success. She was helped by the old clerk, who had been promptly recalled and reinstated, and she certainly did capitally well. She was laughed at, as she had expected to be, and people said they should think Tom would be ashamed of himself; but it soon appeared that he was not to blame, and what reproach was offered was on the score of his wife's oddity. There was nothing about

the mill that she did not understand before very long, and at the end of the second year she declared a small dividend with great pride and triumph. And she was congratulated on her success, and every one thought of her project in a different way from the way they had thought of it in the beginning. She had singularly good fortune: at the end of the third year she was making money for herself and her friends faster than most people were, and approving letters began to come from Nagasaki. The Ashtons had been ordered to stay in that region, and it was evident that they were continually being obliged to entertain more instead of less. Their children were growing fast, too, and constantly becoming more expensive. The captain and his wife had already begun to congratulate themselves secretly that their two sons would in all probability come into possession, one day, of their uncle Tom's handsome property.

For a good while Tom enjoyed life, and went on his quiet way serenely. He was anxious at first, for he thought that Mary was going to make ducks and drakes of his money and her own. And then he did not exactly like the looks of the thing, either; he feared that his wife was growing successful as a business person at the risk of losing her womanliness.

But as time went on, and he found there was no fear of that, he accepted the situation philosophically. He gave up his collection of engravings, having become more interested in one of coins and medals, which took up most of his leisure time. He often went to the city in pursuit of such treasures, and gained much renown in certain quarters as a numismatologist of great skill and experience. But at last his house (which had almost kept itself, and had given him little to do beside ordering the dinners, while faithful old Catherine and her niece Susan were his aids) suddenly became a great care to him. Catherine, who had been the main-stay of the family for many years, died after a short illness, and Susan must needs choose that time, of all others, for being married to one of the second hands in the mill. There followed a long and dismal season of experimenting, and for a time there was a procession of incapable creatures going in at one kitchen door and out of the other. His wife would not have liked to say so, but it seemed to her that Tom was growing fussy about the house affairs, and took more notice of those minor details than he used. She wished more than once, when she was tired, that he would not talk so much about the housekeeping; he seemed sometimes to have no other thought.

In the early days of Mrs. Wilson's business life, she had made it a rule to consult her husband on every subject of importance; but it had speedily proved to be a formality. Tom tried manfully to show a deep interest which he did not feel, and his wife gave up, little by little, telling him much about her affairs. She said that she liked to drop business when she came home in the evening; and at last she fell into the habit of taking a nap on the library sofa, while Tom, who could not use his eyes much by lamp-light, sat smoking or in utter idleness before the fire. When they were first married his wife had made it a rule that she should always read him the evening papers, and afterward they had always gone on with some book of history or philosophy, in which they were both interested. These evenings of their early married life had been charming to both of them, and from time to time one would say to the other that they ought to take up again the habit of reading together. Mary was so unaffectedly tired in the evening that Tom never liked to propose a walk; for, though he was not a man of peculiarly social nature, he had always been accustomed to pay an occasional evening visit to his neighbors in the village. And though he had little interest in the business world, and still less knowledge of it, after a while he wished

that his wife would have more to say about what she was planning and doing, or how things were getting on. He thought that her chief aid, old Mr. Jackson, was far more in her thoughts than he. She was forever quoting Jackson's opinions. He did not like to find that she took it for granted that he was not interested in the welfare of his own property; it made him feel like a sort of pensioner and dependent, though, when they had guests at the house, which was by no means seldom, there was nothing in her manner that would imply that she thought herself in any way the head of the family. It was hard work to find fault with his wife in any way, though, to give him his due, he rarely tried.

But, this being a wholly unnatural state of things, the reader must expect to hear of its change at last, and the first blow from the enemy was dealt by an old woman, who lived near by, and who called to Tom one morning, as he was driving down to the village in a great hurry (to post a letter, which ordered his agent to secure a long-wished-for ancient copper coin, at any price), to ask him if they had made yeast that week, and if she could borrow a cupful, as her own had met with some misfortune. Tom was instantly in a rage, and he mentally condemned

her to some undeserved fate, but told her aloud to go and see the cook. This slight delay, besides being killing to his dignity, caused him to lose the mail, and in the end his much-desired copper coin. It was a hard day for him, altogether; it was Wednesday, and the first days of the week having been stormy the washing was very late. And Mary came home to dinner provokingly good-natured. She had met an old school-mate and her husband driving home from the mountains, and had first taken them over her factory, to their great amusement and delight, and then had brought them home to dinner. Tom greeted them cordially, and manifested his usual graceful hospitality; but the minute he saw his wife alone he said in a plaintive tone of rebuke, "I should think you might have remembered that the servants are unusually busy to-day. I do wish you would take a little interest in things at home. The women have been washing, and I'm sure I don't know what sort of a dinner we can give your friends. I wish you had thought to bring home some steak. I have been busy myself, and could n't go down to the village. I thought we would only have a lunch."

Mary was hungry, but she said nothing, except that it would be all right, — she did n't mind; and perhaps they could have some canned soup.

She often went to town to buy or look at cotton, or to see some improvement in machinery, and she brought home beautiful bits of furniture and new pictures for the house, and showed a touching thoughtfulness in remembering Tom's fancies; but somehow he had an uneasy suspicion that she could get along pretty well without him when it came to the deeper wishes and hopes of her life, and that her most important concerns were all matters in which he had no share. He seemed to himself to have merged his life in his wife's; he lost his interest in things outside the house and grounds; he felt himself fast growing rusty and behind the times, and to have somehow missed a good deal in life; he had a suspicion that he was a failure. One day the thought rushed over him that his had been almost exactly the experience of most women, and he wondered if it really was any more disappointing and ignominious to him than it was to women themselves. "Some of them may be contented with it," he said to himself, soberly. "People think women are designed for such careers by nature, but I don't know why I ever made such a fool of myself."

Having once seen his situation in life from such a stand-point, he felt it day by day to be more degrading, and he wondered what he should do about it;

and once, drawn by a new, strange sympathy, he went to the little family burying-ground. It was one of the mild, dim days that come sometimes in early November, when the pale sunlight is like the pathetic smile of a sad face, and he sat for a long time on the limp, frost-bitten grass beside his mother's grave.

But when he went home in the twilight his step-mother, who just then was making them a little visit, mentioned that she had been looking through some boxes of hers that had been packed long before and stowed away in the garret. "Everything looks very nice up there," she said, in her wheezing voice (which, worse than usual that day, always made him nervous); and added, without any intentional slight to his feelings, "I do think you have always been a most excellent housekeeper."

"I 'm tired of such nonsense!" he exclaimed, with surprising indignation. "Mary, I wish you to arrange your affairs so that you can leave them for six months at least. I am going to spend this winter in Europe."

"Why, Tom, dear!" said his wife, appealingly. "I could n't leave my business any way in the" —

But she caught sight of a look on his usually placid countenance that was something more than decision, and refrained from saying anything more.

And three weeks from that day they sailed.

THE CONFESSION OF A HOUSE-BREAKER.

THIS confession differs from that of most criminals who are classed under the same head; for whereas house-breakers usually break into houses, I broke out. It was not a difficult exit, for there was no glass to be broken, nor any occasion for a burglar's tool-box. The truth is that one night, lately, I could not sleep, and when the eastern sky began to show a tinge of light I seated myself by the window; and by the time the clocks and bells of the neighborhood struck three, I became possessed by a desire to go out-of-doors to watch the coming of the June morning, and to see the world before the sun himself did, and to hear the matins of the birds from beginning to end, because I had been at best an unpunctual worshiper at this service. An occasional early waking or late falling asleep had given me a fragment of the music; but it was much like the way a foreign tourist saunters idly in at the door of a cathedral while mass is being performed.

So after I had leaned out of my eastern window for a few minutes longer, and had heard one sleepy note from the top of an elm not far away, I dressed myself hurriedly, and took my boots in my hand, and prepared to escape. It was no easy matter, for I belong to a household of light sleepers, who are quick to hear an untimely footfall. I stole carefully by the open doors and down the stairs, remembering fearfully that one was apt to creak, and I hardly took a long breath until I found myself out in the garden.

It was startlingly dark under the trees, and the alarmed shadows appeared to be hovering there as if to discuss the next move, and to find shelter meanwhile. A bat went by me suddenly, and at that I stood still. I had not thought of bats, and of all creatures they seem most frightful and unearthly, — like the flutter of a ghost's mantle, or even the wave and touch of its hand. A bat by daylight is a harmless, crumpled bit of stupidity; but by night it becomes a creature of mystery and horror, an attendant of the powers of darkness. The white light in the sky grew whiter still, and under the thin foliage of a great willow it seemed less solemn. A bright little waning moon looked down through the slender twigs and fine leaves, — it might have been a new moon watching me through an olive-tree; but I caught the

fragrance of the flowers, and hurried toward them. I went back and forth along the garden walks, and I can never tell any one how beautiful it was. The roses were all in bloom, and presently I could detect the different colors. They were wet with dew, and hung heavy with their weight of perfume; they appeared to be sound asleep yet, and turned their faces away after I had touched them.

Some of the flowers were wide awake, however. One never knows the grace and beauty of white petunias until they have been seen at night, or, like this, early in the morning. It is when the dew has fallen that this delicate flower and mignonette also give out their best fragrance; and if one is lucky enough to be able to add the old-fashioned honeysuckle his garden is odorous indeed. Roses need the sunshine to bring out their full beauties, though when I held my face close to the great wet clusters it seemed to me that I had taken all their store of perfume for the coming day in one long, delicious breath. The white flowers looked whiter still in the pale light, and the taller bushes were like draped figures; and suddenly I was reminded, nobody knows why, of a long walk with some friends through the damp avenues of Versailles, when the leaves were beginning to fall, and the garden of the Little

Trianon was gay with blossoms. I remembered most vividly how warm the sunshine was upon the terraces; how empty and silent the pathetic holiday rooms; how we strained our eyes to catch sight of the ghosts who must be flitting before us, and trying to keep out of sight, lest one of us might be a seer of spirits, and might intrude upon their peaceful existence. If there were a little noise in the court-yard, I thought it was the merry servants of a hundred years ago, busy with their every-day duties. The scent of the petunias and geraniums and mignonette was filling all the air. We were only stealing in while the tenants of the house were sleeping, or were away in Paris; we had not even a fear or suspicion of their sorry end. It was a strange jumble of reminiscences, personal and historical, that flitted through my mind, as I went walking slowly up and down my own New England garden, among the roses, in the middle of the night.

I could not say it was the middle of the night, or still less the dead of night, and have any respect for myself as a truth-teller. It had suddenly become morning. I sat down on one of the garden benches, and watched and listened. A pewee began a prelude somewhat despairingly and without enthusiasm, and the song-sparrows tried to cheer him, or at least to

make him hurry a little. The bobolinks tuned up, and the golden robins; and presently the solos were over, and the grand chorus began. One joyful robin, who had posted himself on the corner of a roof where I could see him, seemed to have constituted himself leader of the choir, and sang and sang, until I feared for his dear life; one would have thought he had reached bird-heaven before his time. It must have been the dawn of a long-looked-for day with him, at any rate, he was so glad to have it come at last. I remembered the young English soldier whom Howells saw at daybreak in Venice, and I hoped that I should know in another world how my robin liked the day's pleasure, after all.

I became very neighborly with a sober-minded toad, that gave an eager scramble from among the flower-de-luces, and then sat still on the gravel walk, blinking and looking at me, as if he had made plans for sitting on the garden bench, and I was giving him great inconvenience. He was a philosopher, that fellow; he sat and thought about it, and made his theories about me and about the uncertainty of temporal things. I dare say he comes out every morning, and looks up at the bench, and considers his ambitions and the adverse powers that thwart them, in common with many of his fellow-creatures.

The colors of the world grew brighter and brighter. The outline of the trees, and of some distant fields even, became distinct; yet it was a strange, almost uncanny light, — it was more like looking through clear water, — and I still expected something out of the ordinary course to happen. I was not continuing my thoughts and plans of the day before, though suddenly I became conscious that one of my friends was awake, and an understanding between us sprang up quickly, like a flame on the altar to Friendship, in my heart. It was pleasant, after all, to have human companionship, and it was difficult to persuade myself that the mysterious telegraph between my friend and me measured so many miles. I thought of one and another remote acquaintance after this, but only the first was awake and watching at that strange hour; the rest slept soundly, and with something approaching clairvoyance I fancied that I could see their sleeping faces and their unconsciousness, as I looked into one shaded room after another. How wonderful the courage is which lets us lie down to sleep unquestioningly, night after night, and even wait and wish for it! We have a horror of the drugs that simulate its effect; we think we are violating and tampering with the laws of nature, and make the false sleep a last resource in illness or a sinful self-

indulgence. But in the real sleep, what comes to us? What change and restoration and growth to the mind and soul matches the physical rest which does us good and makes us strong? He giveth to his beloved *while sleeping*, is the true rendering from the Psalms.

No wonder that in the early days a thousand follies and fables and legends were based on the dreams and mysteries of sleep. No wonder that we gain confidence to approach the last sleep of all, since we find ourselves alive again morning by morning. And as for the bewildered state into which some of us fall in our later years, is not that like a long darkness and drowsiness, from which the enfeebled mind and body cannot rouse themselves until the brightest of all mornings dawns?

The ranks of flowers in my garden took on a great splendor of bloom, as the light grew clearer. After having watched them fade in the grayness of many an evening twilight, it was most lovely to see how the veil was lifted again at daybreak. It seemed as if the quiet June morning ushered in some grand festival day, there were such preparations being made. After the roses, the London pride was most gorgeous to behold, with its brilliant red and its tall, straight stalks. It had a soldierly appearance, as if the flower

were out early to keep guard. Twice as many birds as one ever sees in the day-time were scurrying fearlessly through the air, as though they were late to breakfast, at any rate, and had a crowd of duties to attend to afterward. The grand chorus was over with, though a number of songsters of various kinds kept on with their parts, as if they stayed to practice a while after service, though the rest of the choristers had thrown off their surplices and hurried away.

I had a desire to go out farther into the world, and I went some distance up the street, past my neighbors' house; feeling a sense of guilt and secrecy that could hardly be matched. It had been one thing to walk about my own garden, and even to cross the field at the foot of it to say good-morning to a row of elm-trees and the robins in their tops, of which incident I forgot to speak in its proper place. But if any one had suddenly hailed me from a window I should have been inclined to run home as fast as my feet could carry me. In such fashion are we bound to the conventionalities of existence!

But it seemed most wonderful to be awake while everybody slept, and to have the machinery of life apparently set in motion for my benefit alone. The toad had been a comfort, and the thought of my friend even more, if one will believe it; and besides

these, I had become very intimate with a poppy, which had made every arrangement to bloom as soon as the sun rose. As I walked farther and farther from home I felt more and more astray, and as if I were taking an unfair advantage of the rest of humanity. In one house I saw a lamp burning, the light of it paling gradually, and my glimpse of the room gave me a feeling of sadness. It was piteous that no one should know that the night was over, and it was day again. It was like the flicker of the lamp at a shrine, — an undying flame that can lighten the darkness neither of death nor of life; a feeble protest against the inevitable night, and the shadows that no man can sweep away.

A little child cried drearily in a chamber where the blinds were shut; — a tired wail, as if the night had been one of illness, and the morning brought no relief. A great dog lay sleeping soundly in the yard, as if he would not waken for three hours yet. I know him well, good fellow, and I had a temptation to speak to him, to see his surprise; and yet I had not a good excuse. He would simply wonder what made the day so long afterward; and I turned towards home again, lest some other house-breaker might go in where I had come out. A belated pewee, who appeared to have overslept himself, piped up

his plaintive morning song, and the pigeons, who are famous sleepy-heads, began to coo and croon, as if they were trying to get themselves to sleep again. The cocks crowed again once or twice apiece all over town, and it was time to go home. The spell of the dawn was lifted; and though I could not resist leaping the front fence instead of opening the gate for myself, I was a little dismayed afterward at such singular conduct, and took pains to look up and down the street, to make sure there were no startled passers-by.

The house was still dark, and it seemed hot after the dew and freshness of the out-of-door air; but I locked the door carefully, and stole up-stairs. The east was gorgeous with yellow clouds; the belated pewee was trying to make up for lost time. I heard somebody in the next room give a long sigh, as if of great comfort, and I shut out the dazzling light of the sun, and went to bed again. Presently I heard the mill-bells up and down the river ring out their early call to the tired housekeepers, and I thought it was a reluctant rather than a merry peal; and then I said to myself something about to-morrow — no, it is to-day — yes — but this was daylight that was neither to-morrow's nor yesterday's. And so I fell asleep, like all the rest of the world, to wake again some hours later, as much delighted and puzzled with my morning ramble as if it had been a dream.

A LITTLE TRAVELER.

THE day I met this little friend of mine (whom I never shall forget) I had just left some other friends, and I was sorry that my pleasant visit to them was over. I had a long journey to take before I reached home, and I was to take it alone. I did not mind this, in one way, for I had grown used to traveling by myself. I was lucky in having a most comfortable section in the sleeping-car, and I was well provided with books and lunch and pleasant thoughts. So, after I had looked out of the window for half an hour, I began to settle myself comfortably for the day or two I must spend in the train. There were several passengers, but no one whom I had ever seen before, and it was some time before I lost the feeling that I was with a company of unknown people, and began to take an interest in my fellow travelers separately. There was the usual young couple in very new clothes who tried to make us believe that they had been married these ten years, and there were

two comfortable elderly women who knew each other and were journeying together, loudly talking over parish and neighborhood matters by the way. Not far from me was a round, red-cheeked old lady in a somewhat fantastic dress, with a big bonnet all covered with ends of narrow ribbon and lustreless bugles. I am sure she had made it herself and was proud and conscious of it. She had a great deal of small luggage in the compartment with her, and I thought she must be changing her home, for she never could be taking away so many and such curious looking packages just for a visit. Beside these people there were four or five business men and a Catholic priest, and just opposite my own place was a little girl.

For some time I supposed she must belong to some one in the car, and had chosen to sit by herself for a while and look out of the window. Then I thought her father must have left her to go to some other part of the train where he had found some one to talk with. But two hours went by, and it was toward noon, and I watched the little thing grow sleepy and at last put her head down on the seat, and the doll she had held so carefully slid to the floor. I picked it up and put it on her arm again so she might find it when she waked. I had noticed that the conductor had spoken to her and I thought I would ask him about her when he next came by.

She did not sleep very long; the stopping of the train startled her, and when she opened her eyes I smiled at her and beckoned her to come to me. So she climbed the seat beside me, still holding the doll, and I asked her what its name was, and if she were all alone, and where she was going. She looked up gravely into my face and told me the doll's name and her own, and then she did not say anything more. She was younger than I had thought at first, and yet she was grave and sober and saddened. "Is n't your papa with you?" said I, but she only shook her head and looked up at me again as she sat beside me. I was strangely drawn to the little thing, she puzzled me, and she was so wistful. She seemed contented, and we both looked out of the window, and talked now and then about the things we saw. She sat in my lap so she could see better.

After some time she said to me, "Mother is dead," in a half-questioning way, as if she expected me to say something; but what could I say, except that I was sorry? — though there was all that wonder in her face at having been brought in contact with so great a mystery. This new, undreamed-of, uncomfortable change was almost too much for her mind to recognize at all, but she had been shocked by it, and everything was different from what it used to be. She knew that at any rate.

"She said she was going to die," the child told me, still watching me with her sad and curious eyes as if everybody knew the secret of it all and would not tell her.

"You will know all about it when you are older, dear, and you will see her again by and by," I said; but she shook her head.

"She is n't coming back any more," she answered, as if she were sure of that at any rate.

There seemed to be no one to look after her, so presently I gave her some of my own luncheon. She was very hungry, and I pitied her more than ever, for the fact of her friendlessness grew more and more plain. She had pretty manners; she evidently had been brought up carefully, and there was a quaint dignity and reserve about her; she did nothing in a hurry, as if she had never been with other children at all and had learned no childish or impatient ways. I noticed her clothes, which were beginning to look worn and outgrown, but were very clean and well kept. It was on the edge of winter, but she still wore what must have been her last summer's hat, a little leghorn hat trimmed with white ribbon, and over her shoulders she had one of the very smallest of plaid shawls folded corner wise, and pinned over neatly. She had some mittens, but she

had taken those off and put them together on the window ledge.

Presently the conductor came in, evidently in a hurry, and when he saw that we had been lunching together he looked as if a weight were taken off his mind.

"I 'm very much obliged to you," he said to me; "I meant to take her out and give her some dinner when we stopped, but I got a message that something had gone wrong up the road, and I had to fly round as fast 's I could. I only got part of a cup o' coffee myself."

"Is she under your care?" I asked.

The conductor moved the little girl to the seat facing mine, and bent over to tell me. "She 's left all alone in the world. Father was a friend of mine, freight conductor on the road, and he was killed pretty near two years ago. Wife was a nice little woman, and the company helped her some, and she sewed and got along very well for a while, but she never had any health, and she died last Sunday of the pneumonia very sudden, — buried day before yesterday. The folks in the house sent a dispatch to a sister in Boston they 'd heard her speak of, and she answered right off she 'd take the child. They can't sell off what little stuff there is until they hear from

her. My wife told me how things were and I spoke to the superintendent and said I'd take her on free, I believed. I'd a-taken her home myself and welcome, but long 's she 's got some folks of her own she 'd better go to 'em. I don't much believe in fetching up other folks' children, but I told my wife last thing as I came out of the house that if I did n't like the looks of the woman that comes for her I 'm just going to fetch her back again. She 's the best little thing I ever saw; seems as if she knew what had happened and was trying to make the best of it. I found this Pullman was n't full, and I thought she could move round in here more than in one of the other cars. There ain't much travel at this time of year."

"I 'll take the best care I can of her," said I; "I 'm going to Boston;" and the conductor nodded and touched Nelly's cheek and disappeared.

She seemed to look upon everybody as her friend. She walked with unsteady, short steps to the other end of the car, and the bride, who was a pleasant looking young woman, spoke to her kindly and gave her some candy; but I was sure that presently the child said, as she had said to me, that her mother was dead, for I saw the girl bend over her and flush a little, while her eyes filled with tears. I dare say

she thought of her own mother whom she had so lately left, and she put her arm close round the child and kissed her, and afterwards seemed to be telling her a story at which Nelly smiled now and then.

I read for a while, but in the middle of the afternoon I fell asleep, and when I waked again the car lamps were lighted, and I looked for the little traveler, who was standing in the passage way of the car. She had taken off her hat and there was evidently something wrong with it, for she was looking at it anxiously and trying to fasten something which had broken. I tried to beckon her to me, but in the seat just beside her was the priest, a stout, unsympathetic looking old gentleman, and I was half amused and half touched to see her give the hat to him and show him where to fasten the strap of it. He was evidently much confused; he even blushed, but he did what she asked him with clumsy fingers and then put the hat on for her, as she stood before him and bent down her head as if he would have had to reach up to it. She was going away then, but he stopped her and gave her some bits of money from his pocket; she came a step or two nearer to him and held up her face to kiss him, and then he looked out of the window a minute and afterward turned and looked at his neighbors appealingly. It had been like a flower

dropped into his prosaic life, I imagine; he was evidently quite surprised and pleased by so touching a confidence.

It must have been a long, dull day for a child to spend, but she was as good as possible, and did not give anybody the least trouble. We talked with each other about her, and felt as if she were under the care of every one of us. I could not help thinking how often we are at each other's mercy as we go through this world, and how much better it would be if we were as trustful and unsuspicious as this little child, and only looked for kindness at our neighbors' hands.

Just as it was growing dark she came to me and put her hand into mine and gave it a little pull.

"Come and see the birds," said she, and I suddenly became aware of the chirping of a robin somewhere near us. It was a funny sound to hear in the winter twilight, with the rattling of the train and shriek of the whistles, for it was really the note of a robin who was going to sleep on his nest in an apple-tree, or high on an elm bough, some early summer evening. But Nelly led me toward the old lady with so many bundles, and I found one of her treasures was a bird cage, and there sure enough was the red-breast, a fat fellow with smooth feathers, who winked and blinked at us and stopped his chirping as we stood beside him.

"She seems pleased with him, the little girl does," said the bird's owner. "I'd like to have her see the rest of my birds. Twenty-three I've got in all; thirteen of 'em 's canaries. The woman in the other part of the house is taking care of 'em while I'm gone. I'm going on to Stockbridge to spend Thanksgiving with my niece. It was a great piece o' work to get started and I didn't feel at first 's if I could leave the birds, but I knew Martha's folks would feel hurt if I put 'em off again this year about coming. But I had to take the old robin along with me. Some folks said it might be the death of him, but he's never been one mite scared. His cage stands in a window at home where he sees a sight o' passing. He's the tamest thing you ever saw. Now I'm so fur on my way I'm glad I did make up my mind to start, though it'll be bad getting there in the night. I think a change is good for anybody, and then I'm so tied down most of the time with the birds that I don't get out much, and there's nobody to fetch in the news."

"Why don't you bring up a few carrier pigeons with the rest of your family?" said I, and this seemed to amuse her very much.

"Sakes alive! I don't want no more," said she; "but then I've said that all along; all the folks that

keeps canaries in our place comes to me if anything ails 'em. Then I take 'em to doctor and get so attached to 'em I can't let 'em go again. I was telling this little girl if I'd known I was going to see her I'd have brought along a nice little linnet for her; he'll sing all day long, but him and the one I put him with is always fighting each other, and all my other cages is too full a'ready. I reckon you'd be good to the little bird, would n't you now, dear?" The little traveler smiled eagerly, while I suddenly thought of the two sparrows that are sold for a farthing of this world's money.

I think we were all anxious to see what kind of woman the aunt would be, and I was half afraid she would look hard-hearted, and I knew in that case I should always be sorry when I thought of the little girl whose hand I was so sorry to let go. I had looked after her at night. I had waked a dozen times to look at her sweet little shadowed face as she slept, with the doll held fast in her arms.

At the station in the morning I found some one waiting to meet me, but I could not go until I saw the aunt. I waited with the conductor for a few minutes, and I was beginning to fear I must say good-by to my little traveler and never know her fortunes. Every one of the passengers had given her something, I believe — picture-papers and fruit and candy

and I do not know what else — and I had seen even the old priest kiss her good-by most tenderly, and lay his hand on her head in what I am sure was a heart-felt blessing. I do not know whether it was some grand old Latin benediction, or a simple longing that God would be near to the lonely child and that His saints would defend her as she goes through the world.

I was glad when I saw just the woman I had wished and hoped for coming hurriedly toward us — there was no doubt that it was all right, she was sure of the child at a glance. I had fancied all the time that she must look like her mother.

"My dear baby!" the woman said with a sob, and caught her in her arms, while the little girl, with a quick, instinctive love, put out her short arms and they clung to each other without a word.

It was all right, as the conductor said again, half to himself and half to me. After a minute the woman said brokenly that she thanked him for his kindness. Poor Ellen! she never knew she was sick till the news came she was gone. He must tell the people out there that Nelly would have a good home. They stopped to talk longer and Nelly stood gravely by, but I had to hurry away, and after I was in the carriage I wished I could go back to kiss the little thing again.